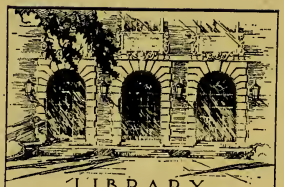

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MEADOW SWEET

OR

THE WOOING OF IPHIS

A PASTORAL

BY

EDWIN WHELPTON

AUTHOR OF 'A LINCOLNSHIRE HEROINE' ETC.

'A daughter of our meadows, yet not coarse,
Straight, but as lissom as a hazel wand'
TENNYSON

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

LONDON
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1884

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MEADOW SWEET.

CHAPTER 14.

AT SNAILHORN.

As her father and Sam drove off Iphis felt, although in the familiar old home, the full measure of her loneliness. For a time she moved about the house, her mind ill at ease, occasionally going to the windows, looking out disconsolately towards the prim, straight, white road. She could hear through an open sash the straw-cutter at work, she could see the pigeons, unsettled as herself, taking flights, wheeling round the buildings to settle down on the ridge of the barn, fluttering up and down the tiles.

'Had I the wings of a dove!'—she would

herself have taken flight—back to Willowby again.

Snailhorn was large in acreage but thin in population. A few cottages were huddled together as if for neighbourliness, else Sam Cowlamb's house lay at some distance from any other. True, the almshouses were almost at the door, but they were downcoming hovels, and had long been an abomination in the eyes of the Cowlambs. The parsonage—a roomy house with an old-world bachelor rector—could be seen from the upper windows of the farmhouse. In another direction lay a rambling old thatched house, tenanted by an eccentric squireen, also a bachelor, half his time helpless with gout. These two old bachelors were the antipodes of each other; there was no animosity between them, nor was there any love lost in their acquaintanceship.

Ten adult souls was a fair congregation in the rubble church, a small building without tower or pretension to architectural beauty.

The pews were high, and in them the labourers' children could carry on the manufacture of doll clothes without embarrassment. The children were quiet, nothing more was expected of them. The Rev. Mr. Gerlimore had a practical way of obtaining a congregation at least once a year. Every labourer who showed himself in person at church on Christmas Day received from the parson half a crown. It was with joyful sarcasm Mr. Gerlimore twitted his congregation individually as it filed out of church—'Ah, Job, thou's contrived to get to church again.' It was 'parson's way.' Mr. Gerlimore quite agreed with them going to chapel if they liked it better; now and then he expected them for appearance's sake.

Some said the rector, although a bachelor, had a son who was a sad dog, swallowing up all the income the poor old parson could spare. The conjecture was near upon the truth.

The eccentric owner and occupier of the

thatched house never went to church—never said his prayers, so persons out of his house said—but passed his time bewailing his loneliness, cursing his gout and his servants, and drinking gin and water.

Iphis, in her early years, had been attracted with the liberal freedom of this well-to-do Diogenes. His profanity was rather a relief after the straight-laced home. Her big brothers were accustomed to tease her because of her preference for Mr. Long, and her periodical journeys to the old house with peaked windows in the thatch. But she had also a great regard for Mr. Gerlimore. Then no one had whispered slander in her ear. Her father never took exception to her goings out and comings in. He lived amicably with his neighbours. Mr. Gerlimore never solicited his attendance at church, but Cowlamb went to keep the reverend gentleman in countenance. If Cowlamb had his convictions he did not allow them to prejudice him. In like manner he went to Long's occasionally,

if the old man's language was an infliction for a professing member to hear. Now and again Cowlamb essayed feeble remonstrance, as in duty bound; it maybe simplified matters if it did not mend them. Mr. Long swore at such childish interference.

As it happened, Mr. Gerlimore was in Haveluck that day, and met with Sam Cowlamb.

'Hi! Cowlamb!' shouted Mr. Gerlimore, descrying Sam in the distance. Then, when nearer, he dropped his voice. 'Are you going home? I was just about to order something on wheels. I'm glad I saw you—that is, if you have room for me.'

'There's nobbut mysen,' responded Sam, cheerfully.

'That'll do; I'll beg a lift. When shall you be ready?'

'Directly.'

'That will suit me. I want to get back to Snailhorn. I must just look up Whittaker.'

'We got Iphis back agean,' said Sam, when they were in the dogcart.

'Eh—now, that 'll do,' said the parson, warmly. 'Come to be housekeeper, eh?'

'That's about it, Mr. Gerlimore.'

'I think I shall go straight up with you; I must see the bairn. I haven't seen her for a long, long time—why, not since your father left. She has been over, though?'

'Oh, aye,' said Sam, 'a time or two.'

'She didn't come to see me.'

'You was out ivery time, Mr. Gerlimore,' said Sam, anxious to defend Iphis from remissness. 'We knew that you was i' London once.'

'Eh—London? Who says so? What have I to do with London?' Mr. Gerlimore's sharp, ferrety eye looked to Sam with a dare-him-to-say-anything-more about his movements. 'Maybe I was at Bath; I often go to Bath——'

'I don't know where you was,' said Sam, carelessly.

'Well, I did go to London. You see, Cowlamb, there's a lad there—no relation of mine—his father died in a bad way, left him and his mother poorly off. His father was a great friend of mine—I could do no less than look after the lad, eh?'

This was a pleasing fiction of Gerlimore's. In his own ears it always sounded pleasing and pathetic, and he thought it shelved impertinent curiosity and choked those people who looked as if they would like to question.

'You niver hev him here?' said Sam, innocently.

'No,' stammered the parson. 'Why should he come to such a God-forsaken place as Snailhorn?'

Sam was giving expression to a dull curiosity as to the personal traits and appearance of this mysterious *protégé* of the parson's.

'I been to London—once. It's a strange, big place.'

Sam could not recollect meeting anyone there, young, favouring Mr. Gerlimore.

'They are all for themselves in London,' said the parson, gravely. 'I often think this lad takes things as if he had a right to 'em, d'ye see?'

'I hate such ways,' returned Sam.

'Is this horse quiet?' asked the parson, for Sam with feeling gave the mare a cut indiscreetly.

'——Ish,' said Sam, calmly.

'But it's a mare. She switches that tail of her's in a hottish way.'

'It's mettle,' said Sam.

'Or maybe it's the flies. They do bother the poor things at this time of the year.'

'Oh! she has kicked a leg over the traces a time or two,' said Sam, candidly, giving the mare a cut across the quarters as if he yet resented her last dereliction.

'Why, hang it, Cowlamb, she kicked just then, I do believe?'

'I'm sure she did,' said Sam, coolly. 'An' she will now till she's tired.'

'Woa, mare——' muttered the parson. 'I think I shall get out.'

'She'll ha' done directly,' said Sam philosophically.

But to Mr. Gerlimore it scarcely seemed likely. The trap was swerving to the side of the road. Nearer and nearer a wide, deep ditch they were pulled, or rather jarred. Soon her leg was over the trace again. As soon as they reached the edge of the ditch the parson, who had been preparing for it, sprang out and landed safely on the bank. Sam sat in and proceeded irregularly a few yards, when, the wheel running over the ledge, the mare gave a leap, landing her forefeet on a stone heap, coming down and jerking Sam out into the drain, from whence he emerged a moment later, drenched with water. He had lost his hat, and his hair was full of sand.

'Are you hurt?' shouted the parson briskly from his coign of vantage.

'No,' returned Sam, inwardly despising the parson for jumping out; it would have been fairer to have finished alike.

'Then, here's for limbs and liberty!' shouted the parson, throwing his stick in the air.

'I'm limbs and he's liberty,' thought Sam, but not venturing to say so. 'Come and sit on her heead,' said Sam, sitting on her head himself, 'and I'll unlowse her.'

'The shaft is broken,' said the parson, gleefully.

'We'll get a rail.'

The mare, set at liberty, struggled to her feet, and stood quiet. Sam examined her knees.

'Wonder she hasn't pared 'em, tumbling on a stone heap.'

'Sea gravel; if it had been limestone it would have done it; but see, she's cut her hind leg.'

'That's th' step. That step isn't reight. I'll hev it altered. One sees a thing wrong and niver alters it till some mischief is done.'

'You must doctor that place with lard and gunpowder——'

'It's a good thing, I know,' said Sam.

'Just stand by her heead, Mr. Gerlimore, while I get a rail out o' th' hedge. How lucky one is!' said Sam, after abstracting the rail; 'I bowt some ta-marl at Haveluck for thacking.'

'What blessings we do enjoy!' said the parson. 'I thought I smelt some tar. Wo, mare.'

'If she kicks I'll brain her,' said Sam.

'She'll not kick.'

'What a tale we shall have to tell Iphis,' cackled the parson.

'She can't say I was worse for drink,' argued Sam. He was congratulating himself on his sobriety. Mr. Gerlimore's word would be taken, his might not be.

The rest of the journey was accomplished with safety. Sam abstained from using the whip, and both men sat in the trap as if only there on sufferance, their eyes directed towards the head of the recalcitrant mare. Iphis came

out of the house as they approached. She had detected the decrepit condition of the dog-cart. She also observed the mare held up her leg when she stopped.

'What's been the matter?'

'We've been over the left, my dear,' volunteered Mr. Gerlimore.

'Thrown out?'

'Well, I jumped out to save myself. Your brother trusted in Providence, and Providence disappointed him, as it most often does people. Never trust to Providence in such jobs, my dear; jump out; do what you think will land you high and dry. I've seen folks who trusted in Providence come to the workhouse.'

'That's all very well, Mr. Gerlimore,' said Sam, 'but I believe in keeping hold o' the reins.'

'Well, I hadn't hold of the reins; and I would rather the horse was killed than be lamed myself. But, my dear, get your big brother a clean shirt and some warm water to

wash the mud out of his hair ; he has been among the water-cresses.'

While Sam was renovating himself, Mr. Gerlimore occupied himself with petting Iphis, inquiring after her parents, and encouraging her to talk of her preferences, whether she liked Snailhorn better than Willowby. Iphis had placed a bottle of brandy and a glass on the table.

'You shall be my Hebe,' said Mr. Gerlimore ; 'pour up—there ; now water to the top of the cuts, not a shade further.' Iphis got out another glass. 'Ah, Sam will have a glass ; it was a nasty spill.'

'How is Mrs. Spikesley ? She's laid up, my gell's been tellin' me,' inquired Iphis.

'Very bad,' said the old parson, shaking his head ; 'I doubt she'll not weather it, poor thing !'

'I must go see her,' said Iphis.

'I wish you would. My housekeeper can make things, but she's a poor comforter. She tells 'em they look like dying when she ought

to tell 'em they're mending. One way of working a miracle is making believe. I've sent a good basin of arrowroot every morning, but she's got nervous, and her mind's low. She's afraid of dying, that's it.'

'Did you pray by her, sir?' asked Iphis, innocently.

'Pray by her!' echoed Mr. Gerlimore in astonishment. 'Pray by her!' repeating the sentence; 'no, prayers be hanged; all I thought was getting her out among her bairns. The woman was starving for want of something she could eat and drink. No, I sent her a bottle of old port and a bottle of brandy and a basin of arrowroot. Yes, arrowroot, a fine thing for ailing folks, and the butcher is to leave a piece o' loin o' mutton when he comes this way. Pray by her!' again repeated Mr. Gerlimore ruminatively, 'pray by her! No! Some good support and some good things into her, better than all my cold prayers. Pray by her—humph! To ask that of *me*!'

Iphis was a little alarmed at the parson's vehement repudiation of such scant charity.

'It's like telling a man to go to church or chapel and behave himself and hearken to the parson when he's an empty belly. Ay, Sam, here is this chit asking me if I didn't pray by Mrs. Spikesley.'

'You did better than that, sir.'

'Right, lad, I did. Get a drop of brandy, Cowlamb, it'll set you right. A glass of brandy and water is a fine thing when you are not well, and a better thing when you are well. They tell me some folks get drunk on it. I don't believe they could. They couldn't make me drunk on it. It's wholesome drink; ay, that it is. A stiff glass will drive out rheumatics.'

Iphis noted that it was a 'stiff' glass that Sam helped himself to. The parson's words caused her to look.

Time passed; the rector was full of high spirits, teased Iphis about his rival Mr. Long, replenished his glass, Sam following suit, only

Sam contrived to have his 'stiff,' as the parson termed it, every time. When the second glass was drunk the parson prepared to go, and during Iphis's absence with him at the door Sam contrived to replenish his glass again.

Iphis was astute. She thought Sam had been modest if his glass had sunk no lower, lavish if it had been refilled. She took the heavy decanter by the neck and almost by sleight of hand tossed it into the bureau.

'Heigh?' remonstrated Sam.

'You've had enough, ain't you?'

'Plenty for *me*, I think,' said Sam.

'It's lonely here,' said Iphis, with a despondent look stealing over her face.

'Lonely? Why—the parson's nobbut just gone. Am ee to shout him back?'

'No, thou needn't. I didn't use to think Snailhorn lonely, and when we first got to Willowby, offens I used to wish we were back. But one sees a lot more folks there. And Towse went wi' us, and I knew them.

The labourers is all fresh here—and we could see a lot o' traps going to Moortown from the chamber windows, and if one liked, one could soon run down to Moortown to the shop. Sometimes we went to Moortown chapel when there was a great preacher. They'd Punshon once. But faither said he was i' Willowby parish an' he'd stick to Willowby chapel, though I do believe it was further off than Moortown.'

'And didn't thou like Willowby chapel best?' asked Sam. There was a twinkle in his eyes, if he had a grave face. But the tone was that of a brother petting an infantile sister.

'Oh, yes,' answered Iphis, turning to the window again. But Sam could see that her neck was aflame.

'Thou'll soon sattle here,' said Sam, consolingly. 'Thou can go to Haveluck market wi' me.'

'I shall be forced to go nows and thens.'

'Thou can go round among thy owd

friends. There's the Plumtrees and the Bees. The Bees lasses are about thy age.'

'What a ways it is——'

'Thou can ha' th' owd galloway and the little green cart, or go on his back.'

'Maybe come down wi' me.'

'I durst trust mysen on his back.'

'Oh, I'll go some day,' said Iphis, perfunctorily.

'Well, after dinner I'm going for a round. Some o' my beans are out yit. They been under watter up to the bands.'

'You ought to ha' got 'em afore the rain.'

''Twas no good till they was ready. Just when they got i' fine fettle, it began to rain heavens high.'

Sam departed after dinner.

'Oh,' said he, looking back mischievously, 'I s'll look in at thy owd sweetheart's.'

'Now, Sam, don't git any more drink,' cautioned she.

Sam marched off, a little affronted. She watched him ride out of the yard. There

was something in being a man, she thought. What liberty a man had! A woman—why, she was always held in subjection—controlled. If a woman asserted herself, took the lead in anything, she was considered to have unsexed herself. What had she not to submit to? Sent out of the way of a lover, who would ever see her here? She wondered if Sam knew why her father had favoured him. And she wondered, too, what would become of Ephraim. She tortured herself wondering if Ephraim would transfer his affections to some one else. She had half a mind to write to him and explain. She did not want to put herself in his way, or make herself cheap, but he might think that she had treated him badly—firstly, in flirting with Robert; secondly, in leaving Willowby without letting him know that she was going. But he ought to have seen that it was her fun, coquetting with Robert; she had not intended to be cruel, and she had not had an opportunity of telling him she was leaving

Willowby, only through the Towses, and they were not the best of go-betweens.

All Cowlamb's children had been well 'eddicated,' as he pronounced it, but if there was anything any of them fought shy of it was pen-and-ink. A book was never a source of entertainment. Iphis got pen, ink, and paper, and for an hour or two fretted an impatient, hesitating mind into greater hesitation and doubtfulness. She spent much time cogitating how should she address Ephraim—'My dear Ephraim,' or 'Dear Ephraim?' she wrote both more than once on trial scraps of paper; she was too economical to waste sheets. Then, after playing with her pen and smiling to herself, she placed herself in an attitude that would have reduced a writing master to despair. She commenced with the approved sentence:—'Dear Ephraim—I write these few lines, hoping they will find you well, as this leaves me at present——'

And there she stuck. How was she to

vindicate herself? 'Lick herself clean' would have been her phrase. Had every one the same trouble with their epistolary communications? But this was out of the ordinary groove of letter-writing.

'I niver hed it in me,' confessed she to herself. She read what she had written, as if it would inspire her to dash on. Then she excused herself—'If one had written to him afore it would be so much easier; and if one was certain Ephraim was the same,' she added, as if to remind herself that this was but an exculpatory letter.

'I thought it best to write these few lines——'

No; she must bring no charges against her father. She was proud and astute. She would place nothing in her letter, so that, if he were base enough (which she could not think) to show it about the village, she should not be ashamed.

'—— as I had not the chance to speak to you about some things before I left Willowby,

I expected that Mrs. Towse would have let you know, but you seemed as if you thought I was to blame, but I was——'

But Sam had returned. 'Dear, to think of him coming back so soon.' She heard his voice inquiring if tea was ready. She looked round at the clock on the mantelpiece. How time had gone surely! She hurriedly gathered up her writing materials.

'Sam must know nothing of this.' But with her desire not to smear what she had written, not having any blotting-paper handy, she was scarcely quick enough to get them out of the way.

'What—writing home? Why, law bless me?' exclaimed Sam. Then he began to suspect.

'No—— to Mrs. Towse,' said Iphis, desperately.

'Mrs. Towse,' sneered Sam, contemptuously.

That was a happy thought. She could address her letters under cover. Mrs. Towse

would deliver them ; the blacksmith, so completely under her father's thumb, might intercept them.

'Thou can finish thy letter,' said Sam, carelessly.

'Nay, it doesn't matter now. I like to have such jobs to mysen.'

'I'll go out a bit agean,' proffered her brother.

'Nay, thou needn't. I shouldn't git it off to-day. It's not to a day or two. I'll see about gettin' tea ready ; I won't be many minutes, Sam.'

Sam liked being talked to in this strain. Iphis could be very cajoling when she chose.

'I been across yonder, Iphis. Your owd sweetheart asked me to ask you if you'd go down after tea. If he hadn't the gout extra bad he would have come back here wi' me. You see, last week the owd man was nimble as a young lad.'

'My owd sweetheart!' said Iphis in simulated dudgeon.

'Ah, well, he said he was this afternoon. I'd go. The owd fellow's rucks o' money, an' no relations. There's no telling——'

That certainly was catching. If remembered in his will, Iphis felt that she would be of much greater account in her own family. People had come into fortunes in unlikelier ways.

During tea-time Iphis talked most hopefully. She could not have been more confident if she had read Mr. Long's will and found her name there—the old man powerless to make another.

'Shall you go, Iphis?' asked Sam.

'I think I shall,' replied she.

'*I* should, if I were you,' said he, pointedly.

CHAPTER 15.

MR. LONG.

Iphis's arrival at Mr. Long's rambling old house created some consternation. She went to the back door instead of to the front. Mr. Long cursed, and declared that was just what people did when there was anything on the way. There had been a great 'cleaning' day on in the kitchen, the plaster between the dark rafters had been yellow-washed and the walls too, traces of the amenities of this important annual festival still lingering on the floor in spots and sprinks. Mr. Long sat in the middle of the floor, being moved as the exigencies of floor-washing demanded, his eye following the circumambulations of the lass's floorcloth, detecting slipperiness of

workmanship on her part, and not failing at the moment on his to acquaint her with it. One would have thought he would not have been tolerated there on such a day, but no business of any kind went on without Mr. Long's supervision. He was very crabbed with his gout and very restless, straining to look out of the window, one moment disconnectedly muttering pious ejaculations, at another making use of the most profane language. These were moments when his memory served him with some recollections of ingratitude, deceit, or chicanery; or, at his own estimate, of the worthlessness of those about him.

'Oh, d—— him, he's a bad devil, and bad 'll come on him.'

'Who, maister?' The lass looked up, her floorcloth coming to a standstill, it a pediment, her arm a flying buttress for the full weight of her body.

For a moment Mr. Long gazed at her

dumb, in apathetic astonishment. At last the deluge.

'A niceish thing for you to put your vardy in in such a way. Get that floor weshed, thou hussy,' cried Mr. Long, with a diabolical grasp of his stick. 'That's the way on 'em, d—— 'em; they come to you humble, with hungry bellies, and as soon as they gets 'em full they turns sa'cy.'

'Tell ya that lad to come here,' commanded he, peremptorily. 'I see him go past the window; he's at them apples, I know he is; if I could nobbut get after him——' and the old fellow screwed up his mouth and grasped his stick still more ferociously.

The girl rose stiffly from her knees, and ran against Iphis Cowlamb.

'Oh, you been busy,' said Iphis in her thinnest voice. 'How d'ye do, Mr. Long? I wouldn't ha' come if I'd ha' known.'

'Now, don't say so,' replied Mr. Long, pathetically. 'I'd forgotten you was a

coming, or I'd been in the room. Miss Grinstead has gone out. Oh, Lord! oh, Lord! what a memory I have! But I'm glad the old devil is out, I am—I *am*. She's always contradicting me, and I pay her wages and find her keep, and I ought to ha' the coping word. Now, then, ha' ye told that lad to come here? Oh, come ya here, ya're a pretty devil, aren't ye? Ugh!' snorted the old man, ominously. Then he chuckled with senile humour, recollecting some former depravity of the lad's, which he highly relished, though at the time of its enactment, for authority's sake, he had counterfeited severe disapprobation.

Delaying for a moment or two, the lad at last made bold to approach slowly, but taking a wide circuit, so as to be out of range of the stick, which he observed the old man grasped firmly, his hand tottering with suppressed eagerness.

'D'ye hear? Come here and unlace my shoes! Now then!'

The lad came a shade nearer, and the old man, thinking he was within range, made a cut at him. It was a miscalculation; Mr. Long had forgotten that he could not bend forward.

'Weant ya do as ya're bid?' stormed Mr. Long.

'Put down that ere stick i' th' corner, or else I weant,' muttered the lad, doggedly.

'Ya weant, weant ye?' chuckled the master, feeling that an armistice must be concluded. 'Now then, will that do, thou joker? Now, bring me my shoes that's blacked for Sunday, and you'll have to help me into the room. Reach me my stick; I hadn't going to hit you, ya desarve it though.'

Iphis found great difficulty in maintaining gravity. Once the mischief entered into her head of handing the old man his shoes on the fire shovel, which she observed handy.

'I'll help you,' offered Iphis. 'Isn't your gout nearly better, Mr. Long?'

'No, d—— it. If it was I shouldn't be

stuck here. You would be surprised what a man I am when I've nowt the matter with me.'

'Oh, I can believe that,' said Iphis, flatteringly. She was rewarded with an old fellow's leer which was intended to be grateful but only looked wicked.

'Oh, law!' gasped Mr. Long, when seated. 'What a job it is to be ockered up like this! and I have nobody that cares twopence for me. There's a parson ower there,' pointing with his stick to a compass point, 'but he doesn't think it worth his while to call and see me; he's over well off. I saw him drive past the other day, and he never so much as looked at the house; and he's the nearest relation I have. I ought to have got married when I was young, and had sons and daughters of my own.'

A sigh of regret escaped him.

'It is a wonder you didn't, Mr. Long,' said Iphis.

'Why, does tha think I'd have been

fancied then?' he asked with a brighter look.

'Yes, I should think so.'

'Ah, now, dost think thou could ha' fancied me when I was a young man?'

'I don't know,' said Iphis, coyly.

'Thou doesn't know,' mocked he coaxingly. 'Ah,' muttered he, despondently, 'they're all now trying to get as much out o' me as they can, or paying off grudges. Why, there's that lad, that rascal, when I'm laid up like this, he says, "I will," and "I wean't," and just does as he likes. And when I want him I ha' to send to look for him. Afore the corn was cut he used to go and hide hissen in it. He's knocked nearly all the apples off my little tree and eaten 'em—I know it's him—and they was hard as flints. He might have eaten all the rest off the other trees, but them seventeen. I counted 'em; the first year the little tree's had a bearing. I wanted to see what they'd come to. Oh, the d——d rascal!'

'It is annoying,' said Iphis, soothingly.

'Annoying?' ridiculed Mr. Long, bitterly; 'it's a d——d shame. He's a bad 'un, a bitter bad 'un, an' bad 'll come on him. He gets at the beer barrel; I believe he goes to bed drunk every night, the scoundrel; and the lass is nearly as bad. Miss Grinstead catched 'em drinking beer like fury one night. Why doesn't she take care o' the key; I give fourteenpence a gallon. They're well met, that lass and lad,' continued Mr. Long, resignedly; 'they may drink to one another's conduct in a pint glass; a glass o' beer would hold all their virtues. I do believe——'

But Iphis stopped what she believed was likely to end in aspersions scandalous by declaring—

'They wouldn't carry on like that where I was.'

'I don't believe they would,' said the old reprobate, admiringly, a brighter light in his plaintive-looking eyes. 'What a difference there is in folks!' commented he; 'some seems

born to slush about, and some to be ladies in the land. That lass is a regular pawdawdles,[1] and the lad's a regular limb—a imp up to all sorts o' thieving and lying. And to look at him one wouldn't think he had it in him. But I can serve him out. I send him with a wheelbarrow full o' stones to the churchyard, then when it gits dark I send him to fetch 'em back, an' I talk o' ghosts afore he starts, and he's forced to pass the gibbet hill.'

'Oh, don't, Mr. Long,' pleaded Iphis, her flesh creeping; 'I shall have to go afore it's dark.'

'So then, so then,' soothed Mr. Long; 'why, suerly thou doesn't heed such rot?'

'No,' said Iphis, stoutly; 'still I don't like to think about such things.'

'Why, it's all bosh. I should like a ghost to come near me. I'd ghost him.' Mr. Long shook his stick grimly. 'Now, I'm going to have a party at Christmas, wilt thou come to it?'

[1] Poor dawdler, loiterer.

'It wants a long time to Christmas,' said Iphis, gloomily.

'Aye, but I thought I'd tell thee a long time aforehand. Thou hadn't going to be married, eh?'

'Not that I know on,' said Iphis, sadly.

'That's a good thing,' returned Mr. Long, as if relieved.

'I thought you said a bit since it was a good thing to git married when you was young?'

'Did I? So I did. But I don't want thou to get married—unless,' qualified he, 'it's to somebody I like. I should like to find thee a husband. There's Joe Bee,' suggested Mr. Long, hypocritically, 'Joe Bee, what does tha think on him?'

'I wouldn't have him at no price,' said Iphis, uncompromisingly.

'Thou'rt hard to suit. Well, it's not him, no. Whist! Here's Miss Grinstead; don't say a word. She might be jealous; think we were talking about her. She's a sour old creatur.'

Mr. Long's housekeeper entered the room —a tall, gaunt old lady, tremulous with the palsy, far from the terrible ogre the old fellow painted her. She was spotlessly neat in her grey alpaca, accurate in her front curls. She was very formal and precise, addressed Iphis as 'Miss Cowlamb,' and was very firm on proprieties. After greeting Iphis, without further preamble she unlocked the bureau and produced a decanter and a wine-glass, the old man regarding her action favourably, but at the same time swearing inaudibly at the presumption of a servant touching his things without being told to do so. When the housekeeper left the room to fetch some sweet biscuits, Mr. Long felt no longer tongue-tied. Iphis protested.

'Let her go,' said Mr. Long, aggrievedly; 'she's no company—always at her love-tales. We're purvelled down with 'em. Reading's as bad as drinking—worse. I've seen tears running down her cheeks, and then she busts out laughing, and nobody knows what at. It

makes me jump; it makes me d——d nervous. When I ask what she's laughing at, she reads a bit, but it's soft; it never makes me laugh; I can always guide *my*-sen.'

'Well, now,' said Miss Grinstead, returning vexed, 'it is annoying, I cannot find them. They are some I made myself; and if you liked them I was going to give you the recipe. What can have become of them? I can't think——'

'That lass has etten 'm, or that lad t'one'r. They're in a band,' interrupted the old man, relieving himself as usual.

Iphis was startled to hear a grey parrot hitherto unobserved repeat the formula, while the old man chuckled approvingly. Miss Grinstead took a short stick and tapped the parrot's toes. The parrot ruffled his feathers, turned over his eyes, then closed the waxy lids, inclining his head in such a melodramatic way of being overcome with remorse that Iphis laughed again and again.

'I am surprised at you, Mr. Long,' de-

clared Miss Grinstead with dignity, 'and before a young lady. If you do not regard me, pray regard the young.'

'It was only a slip of the tongue, my dear,' urged Mr. Long, humbly. 'There's no bones broke.'

'A slip of the tongue,' repeated Miss Grinstead with grave emphasis, her head nodding impressively, uncontrollably. 'People who cannot talk without slips of the tongue have no business to talk at all.'

'Oh, you want to be so d——d precise,' said the incorrigible old fellow, forgetting his past humility. 'I shall do as I like in my own house, Miss Grinstead. What have ya to do with me?'

Mr. Long was very passionate.

'I don't mind much,' said Iphis, thinking to propitiate both.

'Hark ye,' exclaimed Mr. Long, triumphantly.

'I know better, my dear,' said Miss Grinstead; 'you have been brought up in too care-

ful a way to hear profane language without being shocked.'

'Oh, oh, oh!' chuckled the old man, derisively. 'Hark at her. Where has she read that? Isn't she a straight-laced old lass? I'm not surprised she never got a husband.'

'Mr. Long, you never prevailed upon a woman——'

'Oh, didn't I,' interrupted he with a low chuckle.

'For shame, Mr. Long; you will never allow me to finish what I am about to say. But it doesn't matter. Iphis—Miss Cowlamb, I mean—you must not take any notice of Mr. Long's ways. He will do as he likes, and talk as he likes. I am sure I try my best to moderate his language and his——'

'His what? Out with it all, Miss Grinstead. I'm not a bad old fellow, Iphis; I give a lot away. You can't deny *that*, Miss Grinstead; you can't now, so don't. And what's a bit o' swearing? it harms no man; it's all in the way one uses it. If I didn't

swear sometimes I should never keep that lad in order. The Lord 'll never remember that agean me, if I done nothing worse.'

'Taking His name in vain,' said Miss Grinstead, cautioningly.

'That's the fault o' them it's had no impression on,' declared the old man, feeling himself nothing if he was not logical.

'Oh, well, Mr. Long, I will not argue with you.'

'Because you always get the worst on it, eh?' twitted he, adding complaisantly for Iphis's benefit—'Oh, I'm a terrible old fellow at an argument; always was. There wants some wood on the fire; I'se think that gell's nowhere to be found, now I'm gone out o' the kitchen.'

'Oh, don't you go,' said Iphis; 'if there is some in the kitchen I will fetch it.'

'I couldn't allow you, my dear,' said Miss Grinstead. 'I will go.'

'Heigh,' observed the old man, jocosely, 'wear owd uns out first.'

'Thou needn't make ower big a fire,' said he to Miss Grinstead. 'It isn't as if it was cold weather.'

'No; but a room gets cold if you neglect the fire; and it begins to be cooler towards night.'

'Oh, well! oh, well! I only just mentioned it. When does your father come again, Iphis?'

'I don't know.'

'When he comes, just tell him I want to see him—particular. No; Sam wouldn't do. I want to see Cowlamb himself.'

'How did you get on with the old man? Did he say he had put you down in his will for a few thousands?' hiccoughed Sam, first salute.

'No,' said Iphis curtly, seeing Sam's state.

Sam leaned back in his chair and reached out his arm towards a bottle. Iphis endeavoured to intercept him, but unsuccessfully.

'I'll have just another jar.'

'You've had too much already,' said Iphis, plaintive, wrathful.

'What dost thou know about it?' coaxed he.

'I'm not blind.'

'Well, well, if I can't git a glass in my own house, it's a pity.'

Iphis saw remonstrance was futile. Sam had a fierce, choleric temper; he was on the edge of an ugly mood now. Drunken men are quarrelsome or foolish in their cups. Sam was versatile. Iphis fetched a fire-guard and placed it over the fire which was dying out.

'Here, let's make a blaze,' said Sam, recklessly, throwing the contents of his glass on the embers.

'Sam!' shrieked Iphis, in a terrible fright and temper, 'do you mean to set the house on fire? I want to go to bed, and I dursn't now with this fire in.'

'Put it out, then,' said Sam, contritely.

'And I shall take the lamp away; it's not

safe.' She had already stealthily placed the match-box in her pocket.

'And I'm to sit in the dark——?'

'You can, or you can come to bed; I don't know what good you'll do sitting up.'

'Very well,' hiccoughed Sam again; 'make all safe, Iphis; there's a good gell. I've maybe had a glass or two, but I'll come upstairs t'reckly.'

Iphis's bedroom was directly over the dining-room. She got into bed, but she could not sleep—she lay thinking, listening. She was almost despairing. If Sam would go on like this what would she do! She could not prevent him if he was determined. If her father would not have her back at Willowby, she must go out to service. Although this was repugnant to her it was better than living with a being a slave to such a vice. She might get a housekeeper's place she knew; she was clever enough. Mr. Long would have her if Miss Grinstead left him or died. Miss Grinstead was only a frail old woman. Miss

Grinstead would give her shelter until she found something.

She heard a heavy thud below. Sam had fallen out of his chair. She sprang out of bed, she could not lie there quietly. He might have fallen to hurt himself. She hurried down in her nightdress, and stumbled over her brother's prostrate inanimate form. The chair was thrown down, and he lay with his head over it, all the weight of his head bearing upon the throat; he was in danger of suffocation. She dragged him to the hearthrug, unloosed his neckerchief, unbuttoned his shirt-neck, took off his boots, and rolled him on his side. He could come to no harm. She removed the bottle and glass, locking the bureau. Only the water-bottle she left; he might have that if he woke with parched throat.

CHAPTER 16.

'COME LIVE WITH ME.'

WHAT enters into the heart of man is often enough folly in revelation. 'There is no fool like an old fool,' the saying goes. For some time after Iphis Cowlamb had gone Mr. Long sat blinking his eyes, sometimes chuckling, sometimes swearing. He was joyously profane when he thought of the consternation of some one or two persons when they realised their own discomfiture. He was bitterly profane when some twinge reminded him that it would give him much more heart if he were ten or twelve years younger. Upon Miss Grinstead this disturbance had no effect whatever. She was accustomed to Mr. Long's habit of self-communing, during which bitter

aspersion, traducing, self-recrimination, violent abuse, hopelessness, and despondency found interjective, objective, and subjective words of relief. This night his mood was generally most jocose, his attitude uncommonly cheerful, tossing off an extra glass of gin and water as a toast to himself.

'Miss Grinstead——'

'Mr. Long——'

'What should you think to me getting married, Miss Grinstead?' Mr. Long's eyes twinkled uncannily, his lipless mouth with intense satisfaction closing like a rat-trap.

'Oh, nonsense, Mr. Long!' returned she, without looking up from 'Adelaide St. Julian.'

'Nonsense! A d——d fine thing to tell a man he's talking nonsense in his own house.'

'I beg your pardon, Mr. Long.'

'Miss Grinstead; I am not so old as you are by four or five years. I'm only sixty-seven, you're over seventy. I might get married.'

'Oh, certainly, Mr. Long,' returned she,

interestedly. She could count the years she had been with him upon her fingers at one time. Ah, well! surely an old possibility did not yet serve to encourage complacency.

'You don't think it so unreasonable after all, Miss Grinstead?'

'Not unreasonable, Mr. Long, for you are privileged——'

'To ask a young woman to marry—he! he! he! Ah, and when Iphis Cowlamb was in you was hard unto me, Miss Grinstead, damme, you was hard unto me; now, don't deny it, Miss Grinstead!'

'It would be a very foolish thing to marry a *young* woman, a man of your age,' said Miss Grinstead, coldly.

'Not so foolish, Miss Grinstead, as to ask an old woman, three or four years my senior, eh? Ha! ha! ha!'

'Mr. Long, you can please yourself.'

'Miss Grinstead, I am not so sure of that, but I will try to please myself.'

'You always have tried to do that, Mr.

Long,' returned she, with a bland inclination of her head.

Mr. Long swore to himself. What a devil of an old woman this old maid was! If he thought he had given her a settler she was quickly up, and as ready for battle as a game-cock. If he proved himself master, he had got all the wounds.

Miss Grinstead still held her novel, but she was scarcely so much enthralled with it. If she appeared to regard Mr. Long's conversation as a variation on past babbling, she had her wits about her, and quickly grasped that Mr. Long was not toying with a new vagary. He was in earnest. But Miss Grinstead, turning it over in her mind, could not think that young Iphis Cowlamb would bring herself to accept such an old man; and, fond of money as Farmer Cowlamb might be, he had too much love for his daughter to have her young life completely thrown away.

Strange that while Mr. Long was indulging in this newly-cherished hope of yet leaving

behind him a child of his own name, thus avenging slights, fancied or real—for, indeed, it had gone so far in his mind—the Reverend Mr. Gerlimore at the rectory was enduring a species of pleasurable torture. For the last day or two his conduct had almost started a panic in his household ; and excitement, hurry, or concern were not common ailments there. Fat people—fat servants especially—are generally possessed with patience and hosts of other questionable virtues. The fauna and flora of the rectory showed what wonderful effect ample food, little labour, and unruffled soul has upon the frame divine or structure equine. The servants watched their master, unable to account for the strange change that had come over him. They watched him start on his daily peregrination with forebodings. The master, however, contrasted most unfavourably with his servants ; he was short in stature, spare, pinched in face, but possessing an extraordinarily vivacious eye. He looked despondent now, and

he talked in a despondent strain, not looking any one in the face.

'He's had a warning,' said the plethoric groom and gardener, who lived in the house, and who looked like making a second Daniel Lambert.

'Maybe he 's in love,' suggested the sentimental scullerymaid, weight sixteen stone odd. Breathing was at times a difficulty with her, but she was always sympathetic in such matters. She had been over the traces herself, but had been forgiven ; now she pitied those suffering from disappointment, misplaced attachment, or deceit. Poor tender soul, she would weep for a week if any one so much as hinted at her past misfortune and disgrace.

The housekeeper, stout and asthmatical, a matron in consideration of her grade, looked towards Betsy, as if such a surmise was perhaps far from being a wild one. 'His appetite's bad!' said she.

'A bad sign off his pick,' said the fat

groom, gravely, thinking how serious such a thing was with a horse.

'He walks up and down that stone passage after we have gone to bed,' said the housemaid, a female of forty, who continued thin, disgracing the providence of the house according to the others, who was also objectionable on the score of being a light sleeper, nervous, and given to making people uncomfortable by breathing the name of burglar at night, showing herself earnest in her fears by the attention she paid to bolts, locks, and bells.

'Maybe he hurt hissen wi' being chucked out o' Cowlamb's trap. Why doesn't he drive his own hosses and be independent?' asked the groom.

'I think the brandy he got there disagreed with him,' said the housekeeper. 'I know he had had some. I could smell his breath. Farmers can't get such liquors as we can. They buy at public-houses, and gets any sort of rammel.'

'I watched him from his chamber window. He's always at the fish pond; standing on the bridge, staring at the water, or else walking up the pond side after them watter-hens.'

'Let's hope it'll be no worse than it is now,' said the housekeeper, gloomily, lowering her voice, for the baize door in the passage was heard to swing back and close, their master's foot echoing down the stone passage.

'He's had his lunch, and off out he goes again.'

'To meet the postman.'

'Run up and see, Cynthia.'

Cynthia returned to say that the master 'had got on' his best long hat, his best dove-coloured trousers, his cream neckerchief with the white spots, and his buff dust-coat. The Rev. Mr. Gerlimore was in full fig, his servants knew that. If he had put on his black they would have thought he was on burial intent.

Cynthia ran up again—she had not stayed long enough to tell in which direction he was

going; but she was down again quickly. She had retired from the bedroom window, evacuating her observatory—foreseeing the contingency of a renewed occupation on his part. The master had met the postman, and was returning.

'He's not going out anywhere, after all,' said Betsy, disappointed.

'I think he's goin' off his heead,' avowed the groom, callously.

'Oh, James, don't say that,' said the housekeeper. 'He's a good master.'

'Well,' said James, stoically. 'Wait an' see. Iverybody strange that comes thruff peeps ower the hedge, and if he's about they says, "There's that rum owd parson." How they do pahson him ower, for suer,' said groom James with growing disgust at the effrontery of the ignorant and ill-bred. 'Well, I'll begone. I do wish the maister would git a lad to weed. It's a osious job, and makes my back that bad I can hardlins bear mysen.'

Some commiseration was expressed for

James's greatest hardship, the housekeeper adding, with innocent stricture—

'If we did get a boy he would soon be that fat and idle he'd want to do nothing.'

Mr. Gerlimore was heard to enter his study, a name given to his sanctum as a compliment, for there were not many signs prominent of literary exercise. His box of sermons lay in a corner, and he took them in rotation, coming to the right one again at Advent, and so on from year to year. There were divines, but no fingers profaned their margins, unless it was when the housemaid dusted them. On the table lay some half-dozen children's toy-books; one, its cover a gorgeous representation of a dog's head, which afforded Mr. Gerlimore intense satisfaction—being, as he held, a correct portrait of his old spaniel 'Nanty.' Lear's first Nonsense-Book was there, the 'Scouring of the White Horse,' the 'History of Sign-boards,' and Swinburne—an odd assemblage, verily.

Like other old men, Mr. Gerlimore had a tendency to feel chilled. After he had taken off his dust-coat he rang for some coal, and then—the fire replenished—rubbed his hands with some satisfaction. 'Am I to take these away, sir?' asked the housemaid, in the humble, supplicatory strain affected in this house when speaking to the master. She pointed to his hat and coat in the chair.

'Take them away? No! What for? I shall maybe want them again.'

He had a jerky, abrupt manner, speaking as if in a bitter tyrannical mood, but his servants had not lived their numbers of years with him without coming to a correct understanding of his idiosyncrasies.

Again by himself he fell into a reverie, stroking his thin white hair, which in the old fashion was brushed straight down upon his forehead. He was not content with looking out of the study window, but now and again he had to go as far as the hall door and look through the panes there. A time or two he

went to an old convex mirror, but this from some cause or other did not give him the same pleasure or solacement.

'Why didn't I go?' muttered he. 'I got figged out on purpose, now didn't I? I am worse than a young lad. Why not go now?'

He looked towards his coat and hat. Cheerfully inviting they did look as he had laid them down, something in the nape of the coat neck seeming humanly anxious to be out of the house. He had a habit of looking at everything grotesquely, endowing inanimate objects with sensibilities, animals with a human trick of reasoning, all nature as sensitive to a touch—all humanity affected with humorous weakness, to be met with as much forbearance as its humour demanded. The poor were greedy. Selfishness was a fungus on poverty; even when hands were full there was grumbling that there was not more, or at inferiority. Wilfulness was but a natural thoughtlessness of youth, of the imperfectly trained. Much talk, interlarded with flattery,

the most abhorrent to him. Yet he was fawned upon by every one desiring assistance, in the coinciding with his views, in the submission to his foibles. A profusion of 'sir' always exciting his ire, a neglect of respect souring him in his most expansive moods. An oddity was Parson Gerlimore, a curious exponent of Christian ethics, but withal chivalrous, gentle, and compassionate.

'A wife here!' he chuckled, 'Lord, what a nine days' wonder for 'em all. If she could put up with an old bachelor's ways?—but I should have to get out of 'em. Damme, I'm nervous about going to see that chit and what I shall say to her. I'm all of a tremble; bless my soul that I should be so upset, 'lack, alack.'

His voice dropped into a mutter; he was unaware of the housemaid's entry into the room again.

'What a fool I am!' he said audibly.

'What did you say, sir?' asked the housemaid.

'What *did* I say?' asked the parson, snappishly.

'What a fool I am!' answered the housemaid faintly.

'Maybe you are,' said the parson, grimly; 'what else did I say?'

'I didn't hear you say anything else, sir.'

'A good thing for you you didn't. Well, what is it, now you are here? Why don't you knock before you come in? I was talking to my familiar spirit awhile agone, and it's a dangerous time then for womankind,' and Gerlimore chuckled at his own mysticism.

'Yes, sir, I did knock; but I thought you had gone out again.'

'You've no business to think, only to do as you're bid, remember that. I don't like thinking people—damme, that's rather hard,' muttered the parson *sotto voce*. 'What do you want, eh?'

'I come to stir the fire——'

'Very well; I could have done it myself

—never mind. Why didn't you say so at first?'

The preamble over, Cynthia attended to the fire, and left her master to himself again. He then stationed himself with his back to it, occasionally turning round to hold his thin hand over a spluttering blaze.

'What a fire for this time o' year! I'm getting old and cold—humph!' A moment ago his face had a tantalising roguish expression; now sorrowfulness and regret reigned paramount. 'I feel as if the girl couldn't be happy with that drunken brute of a brother. What is Cowlamb thinking about? Thinks she'll reform him, humph! I've never seen a rascal reformed, humph! Strange thing! strange thing! I can see trouble brewing if *she* stops there. Sam Cowlamb's on his good behaviour, but it won't last long. If I were to bring her here—— If I were? What then? I should like to know whose business it would be but mine. She couldn't stay here.'

'What an old fool I am! It won't do; it won't do. Perhaps she wouldn't be happy tied to an old fellow like me. Lasses and lads—she might be tempted. But I mustn't tempt the poor bairn; we'll see, we'll see. Old Nanty and me must live the old life—eh, fat old Nanty?'

A few ancient prints on the wall in old-fashioned black frames caught his eye as they had done hundreds of times before. Now another impression attended him. Such would have to be removed if any woman came to the house as mistress; no wife would tolerate them. Women do object to the naked limbs of heathen gods and goddesses; the old painters were less prurient or colder than we are. Well, well, he could do that. Burn them if need be, and even the cartoon in red which hung over his bedroom chimneypiece. He had a trick of hanging his head, muttering in a grumbling way at perversities. There was no particular language, but this was his safety-valve. In such a mood he struggled

into his dust-coat; having no one to look after him, the collar remained untidy, and with his high straight-skirted hat well on his head, he sallied out of the house again towards the fish-pond.

After contemplating its depths for some moments, he made for the gate without premeditation. It was only when well out upon the turnpike road that he collected himself and began to frame excuses for his line of conduct.

'Ah, yes; I do want to see Cowlamb. I must have some straw.'

Iphis Cowlamb saw him approach the wicket-gate at the foot of the garden. In bygone years how often he had come upon her wading in the brook that trickled below, passing under the road! Sometimes he had caught her emerging from the tunnel; once he had been mediator, when Mrs. Cowlamb was about to rate her for the condition of her frock, which with contact had carried off some of the damp abominations of the tunnel.

Mr. Gerlimore was quite a picture under the apple boughs. His coming quite cheered her, for Iphis's day had been a despondent one. Had he any gingerbread in his pockets she wondered, amusedly. He used to bring it. And when he came from London, some sweet-stuff, or *bon-bon*, so awe-inspiring as to be for a long time held too sacred for destruction.

She ran to the front door to open it, and threw it wide back. As she stood framed in the doorway, the blue walls behind her, and the old-fashioned stairs with broad newels and balusters and rail, she looked like an early eighteenth century picture vitalised.

'Humph!' muttered Mr. Gerlimore, approvingly. 'Where's Sam—— your brother, I mean? I wanted to see your brother.'

'He's gone to Haveluck, Mr. Gerlimore,' said she, plaintively. 'He went this morning. Won't you walk in, sir?'

She could not altogether control her voice. Had she not, since Sam had gone, been troubled, wondering how he would return?

'Ay, I will, Miss Iphis,' he said, with a quick glance at her.

Miss Iphis! She started. She had never known Mr. Gerlimore address her so before.

'And so your brother goes to Haveluck by himself. Why don't you go with him? You mustn't bury yourself here, you know. You must get out, or you will be moped to death. Snailhorn is but a dull place for anybody but old people. Willowby is nearer a town, I understand; must be livelier than this hole.'

'We saw more folks,' said Iphis, despondently. 'Folks often used to come to our house.'

'I thought so,' muttered Mr. Gerlimore; 'I thought so. Now, here nobody comes—nobody. I should make a point of going to Haveluck market with that brother of yours.'

'I didn't care to go to-day,' said Iphis, apathetically; 'there is no butter to speak on this week, and Sam has taken what eggs there

are. But I think when I've been here a bit things 'll mend ; the cows are nearly dry wi' bad milking.'

'The housekeeper ought to have looked after the slut,' said Mr. Gerlimore, sympathetically.

'I can't find much fault with her ; everything in the house is sweet and clean.'

'That's a good thing,' said Gerlimore, cheerfully. She was getting into better spirits, he thought, and he must follow her lead.

'I made a purpose journey to see your brother,' explained he.

'I am sorry he has gone out,' said Iphis.

'Oh, I don't mind it at all,' said Gerlimore, reassuringly.

'Is it anything very particular ? I could tell him when he gets home.'

'Well, it is and it isn't. I want some straw. James never tells me until there is barely enough to cover the stable floor. If I wasn't to look round I believe we should get

to such a pitch there would be neither straw nor anything else on the place.'

'Do you want some straw to-day? A man might bring you a cartload to be going on with.'

'Oh, we can last a fortnight, I should think—maybe three weeks.'

'Oh!' said Iphis, surprised. 'What an odd old man to come with such a tale!' she thought; but Mr. Gerlimore would have had to be unusually whimsical or troublesome for her to be uncivil, or curt, or pert with him.

'What time do you think Sam will get home?'

'I can't say,' said Iphis, her forehead anxious, her eyes unconsciously resting on the clock face.

'I know he does stay late,' said Gerlimore, desperately, compelled to be candid. 'He oughtn't to do. He ought to think about you by yourself here.'

'He gits among company,' excused Iphis, the anxiety yet in her face.

'And you have come here, my dear, to see if you can effect a cure?'

'I don't know. He has had such trouble to keep his housekeepers.'

'He thinks he will have less trouble to keep you. Well, I shall be bold enough to keep coming to see how you get on. I shall look after you.'

'Maybe I shall go back to Willowby.'

'Something's flown wrong, something's troubling you, eh?'

Iphis inclined her head faintly.

'Oh, dear!' said Gerlimore, distressed, 'you're not happy.'

'No,' said Iphis, miserably.

'And you don't like going home——'

'Father said I was to stop, if I could, any how.'

'And you would be happier away?'

'Anywhere.'

'Miss Cowlamb!' Iphis started at Mr. Gerlimore's gravity of voice. She almost thought he was about to lecture her severely.

'Ah, don't get up; sit still,' he added, in a voice quite counter; 'yes, there. I don't wish for a child to go against a parent, but you oughtn't to be here, your father ought to have kept you away. Now, to escape it all, will you come and live in my house? I have a horse in my eye, quite a lady's horse—marry the "owd parson," eh! There, oh, Lord! I've done it,' muttered he to himself, 'what an old fool I am! It's out, and there's no running back.'

Mentally, he was comparing her with those animals he loved the best in the world —horses. In fact, his standard of human excellences went by equine points, he would criticise every person he met. He looked at her.

'Filly—pedigree unknown—not quite thoroughbred—strain of the "drowt"—large bone, good action, quiet, honest, fine trapper, no vice, tender mouth.'

'Humph! did you speak?'

'No, sir,' said Iphis, dumbly.

'Sudden, is it?'

'Yes, sir,' said she.

'Take your time, my dear. So-ho,' said he, gently, 'I am not in a hurry to-day.'

Her eyes went over him. He felt that he was passing examination.

'Aged—standing over—down at heel—groggy,' and 'How long will he be likely to last? What sort of a life in harness with him?' This he thought hit her analysis.

But really her thoughts were more tender. She read between the lines. She knew what prompted him to come forward—pity for her. Ah, well! he was a clean old man. If she was forced to have a man she did not care for, she would infinitely prefer Mr. Gerlimore. He was a gentleman, and she could trust herself with him. She observed this day that his garb was more *en fête*. He had his cream neckerchief in place of the old black stock; his drab dust-coat, not the shabby dark one with buttons as large as a butter-pat; his best

hat was on the carpet, not the venerable one, the napgreen with antiquity and exposure; moreover, the invariable corduroys were replaced. His face—but it was always wholesome and sweet—was smooth at chin, and bore traces of extra towelling, and the hair on his forehead was sleek in holiday harmony. Had he come deliberately to propose marriage? If he had, she liked him all the more. He had been thinking of her, judging that she was unhappy, and so came out of the kindness of his heart to offer her a refuge. He could not help being old. He could not help being thin and small. She felt that she could whip him up under her arm—but then, with all his oddities, the wicked tales afloat about him! Well, she had never heard him utter anything vile. She had never beheld him other than as widely different to other men she knew, those connected to her by blood. Now, to her, the meaning of the word came easily—gentleman. He had a man's disposition, but he had a breeding, and tact, and

grace that was inborn, and scarcely to be acquired.

He sat watching her with a kindly, encouraging twinkle. She looked so irresolute; he could see that she was irresolute. He believed that she would close in with his offer; and as the moments sped on, he became more and more in love with the idea. It was, he thought, the disposition of Providence that had carried him here. When he stepped out of his hall-door, he was then certainly undecided about striking for Sam Cowlamb's. It had come to him from the depths of the pool; he found many of his best thoughts there among the weeds at the bottom.

He did not look back regretfully; he did not wish futilely the sun to go back upon the dial; he did not uselessly wish himself forty years younger; he was resigned to being in the last decade of man's allotted span. His temperament had softened with his years, the world was a happy one if people would only

think so and believe so. No one was intended to be miserable. His sermons had no fire and brimstone in them. At the rate of nine hundred pounds a year he was paid to say something on a Sunday, and he was not going to be hard upon anybody.

Iphis at last looked up as if she were about to answer him.

'Now?' questioned he.

'I don't think *you* should marry me, Mr. Gerlimore.'

'How is that?—Why?—Who's to interfere? I shall ask your father, he will not refuse me.'

'But that isn't all?'

'Isn't it? Got a sweetheart, eh?'

Gerlimore only just awoke to such a possibility. After the first moment's surprise, he began to think himself stupid. Iphis Cowlamb was sure to have lovers.

'Ye-e-s,' hesitated Iphis, 'but I hadn't quite suer.'

'You're not? then you ought to be. You

ought to be very positive about a matter of that kind.'

'But I hadn't allowed to be.'

'You *hadn't*—oh,' ejaculated Mr. Gerlimore parenthetically, 'I see. You've been sent out of the way here, then? Is that your trouble, then, my dear?'

Mr. Gerlimore rose, and Iphis rose too. He took her hand.

'What is there so much against the lad? I must see Cowlamb and talk to him.'

'No, sir, you mustn't,' said Iphis, quickly.

'How's that?'

'I can't exactly be sure now whether I can reckon on him, efter all's been said and done.'

'Bless the bairn,' said her consoler, cheerfully, 'that's all like a puff of wind. Sweethearts have no malice or hatred in their hearts. I am very fond of you, my dear; but for the world I wouldn't have you miserable, tied down to me, just for a selfish whim of mine. And you wasn't tempted, eh?'

asked he, with a roguish smile, inviting her just to comfort him with saying that she was just a little.

'Yes, I was, at first,' smiled she.

'Now were you?' He was hugely gratified. 'I'm glad you were honest with yourself. I see a happier life before you, my dear child. I'm an old bachelor, but I know all these sort of things don't run smoothly, eh? If they did, why there would not be half the enjoyment there is when one has been put off again and again, eh? If you had said 'yes' to me it would have been too sudden and smooth. You might have rued after, eh? You would have been flying to a refuge, not a haven. Never mind, my dear, you can still tell the old man your troubles—no, no, not to-day, to-morrow, if you like—oh, and don't do anything rash, you know. To-morrow? I forgot, I have some gentlemen coming to dinner; next day, or the day after, I will come down, but if you're hard pressed, come and see me at the rectory.'

'Yes, sir,' said Iphis, shyly, endeavouring to take her hand away, but he retained it.

'I wish, my dear, I had had a daughter like you—but then, would somebody have wished to take her from me, I wonder? Good day, my dear,' said he, kissing her hand, Iphis blushing, 'come to me if you are hard pressed.'

He was nearly out of the room when Iphis called after him faintly—

'Mr. Gerlimore, if I was hard pressed, as you say, and—and,' stammered she, 'wanted a haven, could I find the refuge at your house after all?'

Mr. Gerlimore, in astonishment, paused with the door knob in his hand. He had to gather himself together before he could make a reply. She meant more than her words; she meant would he marry her, give her a home, if every one went against her—father, brother, her lover deserting her. Yes, he would.

'Certainly, my dear, depend upon me.'

He would be happy to accept her on such terms. If it is a man's greatest compliment asking a woman to be his wife, it is undoubtedly the woman's greatest compliment accepting him. Poor old parson! he felt that he could not expect a young girl to regard him with any degree of romance; if she consented to live with him and illumine the closing years of his life, that was sufficient happiness.

CHAPTER 17.

A PEACE-OFFERING.

Iphis sat up late into the night awaiting Sam's return. The small hours of the morning crept on and on, and still he returned not. Worn out with her vigil, after declaring to herself over and over again that not another such a night would she pass, she dozed off. It seemed to her that she had but just closed her eyes when the rattle of the car wheels aroused her. She heard them pass the house-end. Sam had returned, but so incapable as to be unable to get out of the trap. She could tell that by the uneasy fidgeting of the mare. She went to the ladder in the scullery and shouted to the groom lad. Having satisfied herself that she was heard, she hurriedly

donned one of Sam's hats, unbarred the door, and went out. It was still dark. She went up to the trap. Sam sat in it fast asleep, the mare, with her nose to the ground, breathing out vapour wearily. How long had Sam been asleep? Half the journey, perhaps. Or had he fallen asleep directly the mare pulled up? Iphis felt the mare's ears; she could tell that it had been driven hard. But Iphis knew that the animal was keen when nearing home, and would find her way without a guide. It was astonishing the turning in at the gate; but then Iphis muttered to herself desperately, 'Them that's nowt happens nowt.'

'Am ee to lowse out?' asked the lad, sleepily, perceiving the master still seated.

'Not before the master gets out,' said Iphis, tartly. 'Sam! Sam!' shouted she, but the master's sleep was too profound. 'Sam!' cried she, more shrilly, again and again. He awoke at last and said, foggily, 'What?'

'Get out of the trap—let me help you.'

'I can git out,' said he, confidently.

She steadied him a little, but as soon as a foot touched the ground he spun round like a teetotum, and only recovered himself by stumbling on the house wall. The latitude of the door he evidently was quite ignorant of. Iphis led him into the house, at the same time speaking warningly to the lad about the mare.

'Now, no cold water and no corn; she's been driven ower fast. She must have a bran mash and some chilled water, and wisp her down well, and don't forgit th' rug.'

'Is — there — any — boiling — watter?' asked the lad, slowly.

'Yes, the boiler's hot enough. Now stir yoursen.'

She saw that Sam again was left so that he could not endanger or suffocate himself. And she assured herself that the sleepy lad had followed her instructions, and brought his lantern safely out of the stable. Then

only, weary and dispirited, she crept upstairs, to sleep fitfully and wakefully, to rise dull and dreary and dispirited to meet the heavy face out of which was passing the sharpness and shrewdness of his boyhood, the astuteness and firmness that had been so full of promise. Was she compelled to stay, must she be dragged down into a slough of misery and anxiety ?

She knew why she had been sent here. Reforming Sam might be the pretext ; but she knew that if she gave a certain guarantee she would be welcomed back at Willowby, and Sam left to follow his own sweet will. But no ; she had her father's obstinacy and mettle. She would never eat humble pie if the Fates were against her ever seeing Ephraim Sparrow again.

Sam Cowlamb was one of those happily-constituted mortals who never have to endure the torture of a headache. After a night's or a day's debauch he might experience a certain thickness or dulness in his head, but this

wore off in an hour. If he could get a strong glass of liquor he felt in a glorious state of health and temper. But this morning he felt more sluggish than usual. He had been out when Iphis came down ; he had washed himself, deluged himself in a sense ; he had changed his clothes ; but there were tell-tale wrinkles about his eyes—his eyelids were swollen and his eyeballs discoloured and dull.

'Where's the key of the sideboard?' asked he.

'I have it upstairs.'

'Then fetch it down.'

Iphis felt that she dare not be obstinate.

He poured out half a glass of brandy.

'Now, lock the door if you like. If you felt as I do you wouldn't go without if you could get it. This will make a new man of me.'

'You needn't feel like that!'

'No ; maybe I needn't. But what have I to live for, eh ? Making money? D—— the

money ; it seems to me as if I had been bred to think of nothing but making money, and making poor devils give me the last penn'orth o' their strength.'

'You don't treat the labourers badly, Sam. They've a pint of beer offens when they've no excuse for it.'

'What's a pint or two o' beer if it wipes out a sore? I drive iverybody, because it seems in my natur' that nobody must hev a idle minute, because I want the last farden that can be got out o' farming. I'm nearly sick. When I kep a hunter or two it wasn't because I took pleasure so much in going across country ; no, the main thing was making money out on 'em. *She'd* niver ha' gone away from me if I'd begun different ; I wanted to drive her like the rest. She hadn't been browt up in such a sharp school as we hev, to slave and make everybody else slaves. I wonder I didn't murder her, but I'd quarrelled with her and gone off to Haveluck raging. When I come back she hardly said

a word. I believe I meant it, but I was in drink.'

'Well, if you go on as you've gone on lately I shan't stop with you, an' that's all about it.'

'*You'll* leave?' said Sam, surprised.

'I will,' declared Iphis.

'You'll not go home; faither wants you to stop here wi' me.'

'I know,' said Iphis, defiantly; 'isn't there other places to go to? I'm mighty independent. I can *find* another place—as comfortable as either; no bad tempers to meet, no men coming home to be lifted out of the trap. And if I hadn't a chance of anything else I'd run away—go to service, something—and I will go, Sam.'

He was subdued with this outburst, convinced that she was resolute.

'You'll not go, Iphis? Stop, and I'll try to mend. If you go, I s'll nobbut go to the devil faster. What did faither bring us

up with such d——d notions for ; no pity, no thought for onybody but wersens?'

'I don't know,' said Iphis, with impatience.

'And where is that other place you could find ?' asked Sam, uneasily.

'That's neither here nor there.'

'Does faither know ?'

'No ; and I shan't tell him.'

'Well, I'm going ower the river to see how the lads are gettin' on wi' that ploughin'. You'll not be gone by I come back?'

'No ; maybe not.'

Before going he came in again. He found Iphis busy at her cream pot. He wished to assure himself that her irritation was over. He was very proud of her, whether it was butter-making, calf-feeding, or washing her eggs, everything seemed to be done so deftly. No other woman had so light a hand. He believed her bread the sweetest, her puddings the most appetising, her joints the juiciest he tasted anywhere. Even when it came to a

piece of fat bacon, it was always boiled through, the 'swath' taken off properly, and powdered nicely with rasped crust of bread. As Iphis looked up she became aware of Sam's propinquity, and that he was endeavouring to look most submissive. What a face he had! she thought, with some concern. A good standing colour was the purply red. Naturally florid, his excesses had heightened his colour. There were striæ of vermilion and white in this full hue. She lowered her eyes again, tossed her head, as if far from appeased yet; then she looked up again, and met Sam's eyes uncompromisingly.

'I mean it,' said she, with a nod.

'Oh, law,' said Sam, abjectly, 'I thowt thou'd forgot all about it. Surely thou doesn't malice one?'

'Malice ye!' said Iphis, witheringly. 'Why should I malice ye?'

'Is it Joe Bee?' queried Sam.

'No such like,' returned Iphis.

'It is a man that's ast thee, then?'

'I never said so. You'll not get to know.'

'Then, thou's made up thy mind not to hev him?' said Sam, with cheerful logic.

'I don't knaw yit,' said Iphis, slowly.

'Well, I shall get to knaw if thou does,' said Sam, with simulated triumph.

'You've hed fair warning,' said Iphis, stiffly. 'It's the last straw that breaks the camel's back.' Sam was determined to keep his temper. But he could not hold back a remonstrance.

'Now, sithee, Iphis, I don't want this chucking at me ivery day in a week and ivery hour in a day. If thou can't git on wi' me thou mun go; bud I don't want thee to go. Stop, and I'll do better. I'll try. Thou s'll go wi' me to Haveluck, and when I go by train to Treminster thou shalt go an' all.'

'I hope I s'll ha' summuts else to do than going trailin' all ower the countryside wi' thou,' returned she, ungraciously.

'I doubt thou'rt a queer lass,' he said,

turning away as if hopeless of ever being reinstated again.

A week passed over and Sam continued temperate. He went to Haveluck market and returned home discreetly in the middle of the afternoon; but he seemed to carry about with him the uneasy feeling of a man who has neglected the most important object of his journey. But Iphis cared not how preoccupied and distrait he was so long as he continued abstemious. Sam approached her diffidently, his attitude suggesting evil tidings or some painful office he had to acquit himself of. Iphis regarded him with some trepidation. He drew from his pocket a small parcel which he placed in her hand.

Then she laughed, a little questioningly, as if wondering whether hilarity was out of place, and said, 'What is it?'

'Mind thou doesn't have it down,' cautioned he, gravely.

'What is it?' repeated she. 'A brooch?'

'Open it and see,' advised he.

She cut the string with her scissors—she would have been much more careful inserting the blade, had she had the faintest suspicion of that which lay within. Sam was rather impatient at her dilatory way, but as soon as she took the lid off the box he turned away his head like a bashful schoolboy.

'Oh!' was all Iphis could exclaim. Her eyes were dazzled with a lady's gold watch and the chain coiled about it. Then she felt as if she scarcely deserved such a gift; it was a peace-offering, ought she to accept a bribe?

'You've been spending a lot of money over this, Sam, and I had a watch—a silver one.' Her tone was one of delicate reproach.

'I thowt it wasn't good enough for thee.'

'Father bowt it for me,' said she, as if steadfast yet in the faith that what her father bought was good enough for any one.

But the gift was a generous one. What woman could have shown the faintest resentment after such a surprise?

For many days her gratitude continued to absorb her. Sam was most uncomfortable under it. He felt much as if he had been a criminal guilty of some underhand conduct with his jailer. If he could but have seen her examining it in her sacred hours, holding it near and far for effect—whichever way she viewed it, it was faultless in her eyes, fresh from the mint. In the evenings she had a terrible anxiety about the correct time. It was set by Haveluck time, and by it their clock was an hour and four minutes fast. When she rose in a morning the day was to be a delightful one, for it preceded the evening when she should shine, a gold chain about her neck.

But a gew-gaw was not to spoil her appetite for work, or take the edge off her energy. She was just finishing the last thing of her wash one Tuesday morning when, looking up, she beheld a dear face. It was her father's. He had driven over from Willowby. She and the girl had risen at three o'clock in the

morning, having gone to bed the night before at half-past eight, the usual practice when wash-day was imminent. It was a notion she had inherited that two hours in the early morning were worth four after dinner, that it was much better than retiring at ten to rise at six. On exceedingly pressing wash-days it was bed at eight and up at one, and the scullery had a Rembrandtic effect with the single candle and the copper fire casting out a red glow.

'I've about done,' cried Iphis to herself, joyfully, wiping her hands on her harden apron, which was wet as her hands with standing at the tub. 'I wonder where Sam is?'

Just then her father came into the wash-house, crying out boisterously—'Now then, my lass, is break'ast ready? How does ta git on?' asked he, fondly, his arm about her and the wash-house echoing with a resonant kiss.

'Breakfast!' cried Iphis, deridingly,

'we've hed ours hours agone. I've been up since three.'

'And so have I,' said her father. 'I thowt I'd git ower here afore it was warm. Now, that lad weant gie that mare any watter yit?'

'No; go stop him, Becky.'

'And where's Sam?'

'They're ploughing in the bottoms.'

'Oh! he puts in plenty o' lime? Awful strong that close, clung; bud I'd th' best bit o' wheat off it I iver hed onywhere.'

'They'll be lowsing out, I'se think,' said Iphis; 'Sam weant hev th' hosses harried.'

'It's what I used to do. I'll have a snack, then I'll go down, eh?'

And when he sat to the table Iphis bounced out of the room, upstairs and down again, to her father's hazy wonder. She returned with the *objet de luxe* she thought about so constantly. It was almost with her in her dreams, and for the nonce had almost

ousted the other round face of her whilom lover.

'Who's gen thee that, then?' questioned the farmer, stolidly. He would evince no admiration until he was informed of the donor.

Gratitude overruled any playfulness. 'Sam!' returned she.

'It's a grand watch an' cheean.'

A grim smile hovered at his mouth, but his eyes were fastened on a morsel of cheese. Sam had never done anything in his life to win him greater forgiveness and goodwill.

'And how do you agree?' asked the farmer.

'Oh, very well. Sam just lets me do as I like.'

'Then thou'll be reight, I'll uphold it. Women want to do as they like,' said her father, bluntly; 'bud they can't allus, and it isn't fitting they should.'

'Father,' said Iphis, when Cowlamb was about rising, 'Mr. Long wants to see you.'

'Oh, I can't be bothered with that silly owd rip.'

'But he was very particular. The first time you come ower you was to go there.'

'I s'll ha' none so much time. I want to be at Haveluck fair to-morrow morning. Sam 'll be suer to go wi' me. Then I s'll drive home fra here i' th' efternoon. I mun go. I want to buy some steers.' [1]

'You needn't stop long; you ought to go, father,' urged Iphis, after a little hesitation. 'Sam thinks you ought. Sam thinks I'm a great favourite o' the owd man's.'

'I see, I see. And the pair on ye think he'll leave thou his money, bah!' contemptuously muttered her father, snapping his fingers. 'It's bad reckonin' o' dead men's shoes, they nearly allus kicks 'em off wrong.'

Iphis felt a little embarrassed or ashamed, it is hard to say which. She felt that she had been misled, or interpreted wrongly; was money his one object in life? Mean calcu-

[1] Oxen.

lation clashed with his openness of soul, it seemed.

Cowlamb pursued his way towards the field that was being ploughed. He was in a good mood, the exhibition of Sam's gift disposing him to be most cordial with his son. Inwardly too he was laughing at Iphis's simplicity, as he imagined it—and at Sam encouraging her in such notions; it was best to disabuse her of the idea of inheriting from an old man who wasn't distantly related even. When Cowlamb reached the narrow river, Sam and the lads were bringing the steaming horses over in the flat-bottomed boat. Sam was overcome with his father's cordiality, unable to account for it.

'Was t' thinking o' going to Haveluck fair?' asked Cowlamb senior.

'I hed thought about it,' answered Cowlamb junior.

'Thou may drive me ower i' the morning. We must start i' good time; I mun be back at Willowby at night.'

'I'll drive you. Maybe Iphis ud like to go?'

'We'll see. What's all this about Mister Long? You ain't been stuffin' her heead full o' nonsense?'

'Not I. Owd chap was rank on her going to see him, and when she went—law! I don't know what wasn't said. I just tell her to keep o' the reight side o' the owd chap.'

'That's been plenty. She's a'most as cocksure as if she'd seen her name in his will.'

'I shouldn't wonder at him leaving her a lump,' said Sam, seriously.

'Nay, now! Then you would go see him?'

'It'll cost nowt, an' may mean a good dele.'

'Then I'll go. I don't want to stand in any o' your lights, if I know it.'

'You niver ha' done that, father,' said Sam, his fervour tainted with perhaps a little hypocrisy. Sam felt under his father's thumb

much the same as when he was a boy, only now he was in constant default.

'It's summuts to hear you say so,' said Cowlamb, with a little asperity. 'I'll go down and see this owd creatur as soon as I've had my dinner; but there's no end to him.'

CHAPTER 18.

SOMMATION RESPECTUEUSE.

Farmer Cowlamb reached Mr. Long's house before dinner was over there. Mr. Long greeted him cordially, and blinked across at nothing, having a secret meaning in all his little tricks. He was evidently possessed of thoughts, not too numerous, but too important to reveal at that moment.

'It seems like owd times, na'bour,' whined he; 'what will ye drink? I allus have a glass o' gin efter dinner—what did you say, Miss Grinstead—"and a good many afore?" Well, I buy my gin by the gallon a'way—don't ee, and who's a better right to drink it, hay? Don't you git a sly drop at times?—

"Mr. Long, I've a pain in my inside." Oh, you old cats.'

'Really, Mr. Long!' cried the affronted Miss Grinstead.

'No offence, no offence,' said Mr. Long, blandly, quick to take her up. 'You're welcome if it does you as much good as it does me. I never begrudge anybody anything. Is that a clean glass? Jist look at it, Cowlamb. I hate a mucky glass, mysen.'

'Really, Mr. Long,' interposed his housekeeper, with increased indignation, 'do you think I would give Mr. Cowlamb other than a perfectly clean tumbler?'

'No such thing, Miss Grinstead—sit down, you owd fool, ya've dragged the cloth of the table nearly. Mucky lasses, mucky lads; if they smell owt in a glass, they turns it upside down and sucks the dregs out—I seen 'em at it, I watch 'em. Then somebody's coming, and into the cupboard it goes without weshin'. I tell ye, Miss Grinstead, I know; that's how so many of them glasses get broken. When

they get to be a penny apiece I'll have a fresh glass for ivery tot.'

'You've said so before,' said Miss Grinstead, coldly.

'Heigh, maybe I have,' cackled Mr. Long.

None of this acerbity was edifying or pleasing to Cowlamb. He thought in his matter-of-fact way that the old couple were a pair of boobies.

'Now,' said Mr. Long, loudly, after the removal of the cloth, 'I want to have a bit of talk with you, Cowlamb.'

'Oh, indeed, so Iphis teld me, but I aint a dele o' time.'

'Oh, it weant take up much time. When Miss Grinstead's rembled all the things we'll have a private crack together.'

This was given in the same loud tone, and intended as a gentle hint. Of course, Miss Grinstead took it. Mr. Long's hints were not easily misunderstood by any one; his innuendoes were seldom cloaked with artifice.

'I'm glad the owd thing's gone,' said Mr. Long, with a sigh of relief, and chuckling the moment after. 'She thinks she's going to live the longest, and I shall leave her so much a year. I did make her believe so once, but I shan't. I aint a relation in the world, Cowlamb, barring a parson fellow, and he doesn't bother hissen about me. Well, 'tis his loss ; he's maybe plenty o' money without any o' mine. He was past here t'other day, and never so much as looked the side one was on.'

Mr. Long was very fond of citing this instance of the callosity of his nearest relative. As it happened, it was over two years since the graceless act took place.

But Miss Grinstead intruded upon them, whereupon Mr. Long darted a look at Cowlamb, implying to the farmer that he must now understand what it was to be hampered and overlooked by this inquisitive old woman. Most likely she had been eavesdropping. There would have been an ebullition, but

Miss Grinstead forestalled it by saying quickly—

'Here's Jasper; he wishes to speak to you, Mr. Long.'

'Oh, does he? He may wait.'

'But he says he must speak to you.'

'Like his confounded impudence! Send him in, then; I'll soon sattle him,' vowed Mr. Long, vengefully. 'Now, what d'ya want?' he demanded, as Jasper entered.

Jasper's countenance was sullen and vicious. He stood in the doorway, his old hat, with a piece of crimson worsted round it, crumpled up in his two hands.

'I want three pounds!' a request, couched so much in the nature of a demand it almost took Mr. Long's breath away.

'A d——d nice way of asking for money, that is,' gasped his master.

'I want it or I shouldn't ask for it,' returned the servant, sulky and ungracious.

'And ya weant ha' three pounds,' said Mr. Long, recovering himself, and chuckling that

he was master of the situation. 'What d'*ya* want three pounds for? I shall gie ye no three pounds. What d'ya want three pounds for, eh?'

'Here's a fellow i' Haveluck says he'll put me i' th' Court if I don't pay in a week,' blubbered Jasper, in desperation, terribly afraid of this mysterious Court and its workings.

'Well, he may put tha in the Court for what I care,' said Mr. Long, with indiscreet joy; 'ya shall ha' none of my three pounds.' And Mr. Long compressed his lips, composed his face, looking straight at the man, but as though he saw the wall through a phantom.

Jasper waited a moment, then accepted his *congé*. Mr. Long thought him cowed, Cowlamb thought the expression decidedly bellicose. Mr. Long was some time silently chuckling, grasping and relaxing his hold of his favourite stick, which was scarcely ever out of his hands save at meal times. Then, he leaned it against the table. Sometimes it fell

down, and on such occasion he swore, for he was nervous and it startled him, and the girl had to be rung in to pick it up.

At last Mr. Long, looking towards Cowlamb, observed his caller's glass was empty.

'Why, you got no liquor?'

'It's little I drink,' said Cowlamb.

'Humph! maybe you like a bit of sugar.'

Mr. Long rang the bell, and the girl appeared.

'Bring the sugar basin, lass.'

Cowlamb, taking out a couple of lumps, observed a folded piece of paper. Mr. Long was chatting; at last he said, despairingly, 'That fool's never brought a stirrer.'

'Never mind,' said Cowlamb, 'I can use the spoon; I think there is something here for you.'

'Eh?' Mr. Long took the paper, eyeing it with some concern. He put up his spectacles, unfolded it, and read a 'warnin'—notice to leave in a month. Mr. Long swore bitterly, and rang for Jasper to be sent in quickly.

Jasper was ushered in, his face carrying an expression of dogged reserve.

'I say, what does this mean?' glared his master, desirous, although now greatly concerned and timorous himself, to cow this rebel into submission; 'ya're going to leave?'

'Yis, I am,' replied Jasper.

'But if I gie ye the three pounds ye weant leave?' queried Mr. Long, supposititiously.

'No,' returned Jasper.

'Ya're suer on it?'

'Yis, I am.'

'And ya'll stop yar full time, as we agreed on?'

'Heigh!' responded Jasper, with melted incivility.

'Now ya're religious?' said Mr. Long, impressively; under such a profession it was incumbent upon Jasper to adhere to his word once given. 'Now, remember ya're suer ya will?'

'Suer,' repeated Jasper, fervently.

'D'ye owe any more i' Haveluck?'

'No, maister.'

'Ya're suer?'

'Suer,' repeated Jasper again.

'Then I'll let ye ha' th' three pounds, as ye said ye'd stop. You know,' said Mr. Long, *par parenthèse* to Cowlamb, Jasper still in the room, 'I thought I might happen something in the night. I might be dying and nobody near me, so I have him to sleep in the same room; only he's such a devil! I *have* to knuckle under nowadays,' said Mr. Long, turning querulous; 'if I do owt that doesn't suit, he says he'll leave. He's gen me notice heaps and heaps o' times. I *ha'* to pull in!'

It was a feature of Mr. Long's locution that he adopted the broadest vernacular with his servants and those whom he could hector to; but to people of his own station he had a choicer and less profane idiom.

'D'ya like yar quarters?' resumed Mr. Long, turning to Jasper.

Mr. Long was desirous to impress Cow-

lamb that he was not all 'fire and tow,' but could be very jocose and sweet-tempered.

'Heigh,' answered Jasper, coolly, 'I can do wi' 'em; I slept very well last night.'

'Oh, then, ya'll winter there,' intimated his master, chuckling again as if another triumph was scored to him. He was putting the fellow in for a trial of his temper.

Cowlamb began to be weary. He wanted Mr. Long to release him. He had been a little entertained with Mr. Long's duel with Jasper; but with Cowlamb business was always paramount—business always before pleasure. When Jasper went off exulting, the three pounds in his palm, Cowlamb spoke out.

'You was particular to see me, Mr. Long, I'm teld?'

'All in a neighbourly way,' said Mr. Long, cautiously. 'I no relations to speak of,' continued Mr. Long, as if seeking sympathy.

Cowlamb was far off the scent, but he knew that his *vis-à-vis* was driving at something.

'Oh, well!' said Cowlamb, 'it's often a good thing for a man when he has no relations; when they come a borrowing, and you've been beho'den to 'em at some time, you feel forced to part, when at the same time you know you'll niver git it back.'

'Jasper's a reight to his three pounds—I shall stop it out of his wages.'

'That wasn't what I meant,' said Cowlamb.

'No, no, I know——' Mr. Long with difficulty got to his feet, and with the aid of his stick and occasional assistance from the table, contrived to hobble to the door, shuffling his feet on the carpet noiselessly, gesticulating to Cowlamb not to speak, his ambition being to reach the door and open it suddenly.

He opened it and closed it with some satisfaction.

'I've some queer ones about me, Cowlamb,' appealed Mr. Long; 'if I've onybody comes in

a friendly way, they're spying round to hark at what's said. They're jealous for fear somebody but them'll come in for my money. But I'll sarve 'em all out,' chuckled he demoniacally. 'Miss Grinstead wodn't stop at the wages she gets; she thinks she's down i' my will. Human nature, Cowlamb, is very weak. Law, 'tis a bad thing to reckon o' chickens afore they're hatched. I've thought, Cowlamb, o' getting married!'

'Married?' said Cowlamb in surprise.

'Eh, man, married. What d'ye think about it?'

'Why, I think ya ought to ha' thowt about it afore.'

'I ought,' assented the aspiring bachelor, sadly, 'but, then, she wasn't ready then, and I didn't think about it then.'

'She's a young woman, then?' said Cowlamb, opening his eyes a little wider. Not the faintest suspicion arose in his mind that he had any concern in his old neighbour's contemplated nuptials.

'Well, she is a good dele younger than me,' confessed Mr. Long.

'Mind you don't make a mistake,' said Cowlamb, with a grave shake of his head.

'I am not sure, Cowlamb; but I don't think you would think I was making much of a mistake if I was to tell you the name of the young woman.'

Mr. Long's fervour and pedantic way of talking led Cowlamb still further away. His old neighbour spoke like a staid man demented with a late passion.

'Who is this young woman? Onybody I know?'

'Yes,' chuckled Mr. Long, joyfully trapping his man, 'it's Iphis!

'Iphis!' gasped Cowlamb, unable to say more for some seconds. He could have felled the old heathen, or given some instructions to test Mr. Long's capacities for a madhouse. But in those few seconds Cowlamb's habit of looking at matters financially modified the shock.

'I'm an oldish man, I know,' said Mr. Long, apologetically, 'but, dam'me, I'm lively, now, ant ee? We're old friends, Iphis and me. I hadn't going to live for ever, and I shall leave her all my money; make my will again. She shall do just as she likes—turn the house upside down or inside out. Lord, I shall be better in a week or two. I can walk uncommon well when I'm rid o' this blasted gout. Lord, Cowlamb, if I could leave a little Long—er!'

But puns were lost upon the farmer. Cowlamb was so utterly overwhelmed that he lost all presence of mind—almost all his wit.

'Now, what d'ye say?' asked Mr. Long, impatiently.

'I don't know what to say,' answered the farmer, slowly. 'What does she say?'

For a moment Cowlamb thought that Iphis's anxiety to get him across to the old house arose from some shrewd guess that she might be mistress there. Disappointed be-

cause her first choice was unfortunate, she was prepared to accept any one.

'The devil!' ejaculated Mr. Long; 'I don't know what she's got to say. I should think she would have me if you were to put it to her.'

'I don't know so much about that,' said Cowlamb, dubiously.

'Why, hes she another sprunny?' asked the suitor, anxiously.

'No,' said Cowlamb, peremptorily. *He* would not acknowledge that other suitor.

'Well, then, that would be easily managed. I'm worth a goodish bit. If that wouldn't tempt a woman, what would?'

Cowlamb was already tempted.

'I don't think she would like Jasper!'

'Jasper! What's Jasper? Oh, hang it! Cowlamb——' Mr. Long actually looked prudish. 'Why, to be suer he'd be turned out neck and crop.'

'Bud you said he'd winter there.'

'Heigh, ya're a simple fellow in some things, Cowlamb.'

'Maybe I am,' said Cowlamb, agreeably.

'You'll mention it to her; tell her I've a lot o' money, and there'll be plenty of time for her to have somebody else after me. Bud if we were to have baens, of course I should want them to inherit. Still she should ha' no cause to complain.'

Mr. Long now entered into a statement of his real and personal estate, and Cowlamb began to be dazzled, to think that Iphis must marry Mr. Long, or otherwise incur further displeasure. To refuse such a chance would be cutting Providence in the face. Cowlamb thereabouts settled it in his mind that Iphis was the future Mrs. Long, and that for prudential reasons it would be wise to hurry on her nuptials.

CHAPTER 19.

COUNSEL.

Iphis was surprised, looking out of window, to behold Miss Grinstead's tall, spare figure coming up the garden-path nearly at a run. She held her dress high, her skirt was apparently strained to a solitary hoop, showing a pair of white-stockinged ankles of sickening proportions.

'Bless me, Miss Grinstead,' ejaculated Iphis; 'why, isn't father at your house?'

'My dear, he is; that is why I have come.'

'He's not been taken bad?'

'No, no. I must sit down and rest a minute before I can speak. I am quite out of breath.'

'I have some sherry wine.'

'Thank you, I will take a glass. You are kind.'

'Nay, you're always good to me, Miss Grinstead. I wish you would come here oftener.'

'I cannot leave Mr. Long often, and then only at a forceput. To-day it is a forceput. Oh, Iphis, you will scarcely believe it when I tell you, but do you know why Mr. Long wished to see your father? Mr. Long wants to marry you?'

'Marry me!' shrieked Iphis, amusement, consternation, and unbelief combined.

'Yes,' gasped Miss Grinstead, her palsied hands shaking nervously. 'That is why Mr. Long sent for your father. I knew he had some badness in his head when he sent me out of the room, but I didn't go far,' said the old lady in a stage whisper. 'After a time Mr. Long hobbled to the door to see if any one was listening. He nearly caught me, but I just heard his fingers at the door knob—I had

the closet door open and I stood in the doorway, so I shut myself in until he went away again.'

Miss Grinstead shook her head melodramatically. She had some admiration for her own craft. Iphis laughed a little hysterically.

'And what did father say?'

'He didn't say anything at first. He was too much surprised, I think.'

'What did he say after?'

'I can scarcely tell you. He scarcely seemed to have made up his mind, I thought. When Mr. Long began to tell him how much money he had out and where it all was, I set off as fast as my poor legs would carry me to come and put you on your guard.'

'I have made up my mind,' said Iphis.

'Not to marry Mr. Long?' inquired Miss Grinstead, anxiously.

'No.'

'You are right, my dear, not to have him. Look at his age! And he swears so, it is not fit any young person should be in his company.

He is a bad old man, and he has been a bad old man.'

Iphis began to have a suspicion that the old lady was depreciating the commodity to secure it herself. That was a veritable jobber's trick.

'Supposing Mr. Long was to ask you, Miss Grinstead, to have him, would you have him?'

Iphis assumed extreme guilelessness.

The question was put so point blank, Miss Grinstead felt herself somewhat cornered.

'Do you think, my dear, it would be wrong for me to accept him?'

'Not wrong,' said Iphis, with mock meditativeness.

'I am near Mr. Long's age,' mused Miss Grinstead, complacently.

Iphis laughed to herself.

'I shall not have him, Miss Grinstead,' said Iphis, decisively. 'I think it would be more like if he were to ask you. If Mr. Long does ask me I shall tell him so.'

'Perhaps he would be offended——'

'At me refusing him or suggesting you?'

'He would be angry, I know, if you refused him; perhaps he would be cross if you mentioned me.'

'He must be a strange, queer man,' said Iphis, with simple good humour. 'After living all these years with him, he ought to have you.'

'Do you really think so?' asked the old lady, beaming.

'Of course I think so,' said Iphis.

'Ah,' sighed Miss Grinstead, 'he forgets what I have done for him; but I shall have to go, or Mr. Cowlamb will be leaving; and directly your father goes, Mr. Long will ask for me. He little thought I was in the closet.'

'Had you any suspicion of what he wanted father for?'

'Yes,' returned Miss Grinstead, readily. 'You remember the day you came? Well, as soon as you had gone he began to laugh to himself, and mutter, and swear; then he had

some of his wicked old stories to tell, and wicked jokes about getting married and serving everybody out. He has been full of it ever since. I believe he is quite sure you will have him if your father is only agreeable. I should not like to tell you everything he has said, but he has never mentioned your name —no, not once.'

'If you'd ha' teld me, I could have stopped father from coming,' said Iphis.

'Now, I didn't think of that,' said Miss Grinstead.

Miss Grinstead's story was so concise, Iphis could not doubt her. Iphis smiled at the rivalry. Mr. Long might be an ogre, but Miss Grinstead, although deeming it almost a pact unholy for a young girl, herself was not at all indisposed to listen.

'You'll not think, my dear, I want to stand in your light; no! It is another thing, a poor old woman like me; it would be for the home, you know.'

'I understand all that, Miss Grinstead,'

said Iphis, cheerfully. 'I an't going to be made to have him ; there! And thank you for coming.'

When the old lady was gone, Iphis sat down to cogitate. She was quite decided in her mind about Mr. Long. Soon she began making comparisons on the two elderly swains who sought her hand. Mr. Gerlimore had come to her himself ; Mr. Long craftily endeavoured to get at her father, playing upon his greed for money and standing. Of the two she would prefer the hale Mr. Gerlimore to the hearty Mr. Long. The decrepit old rascal, to bid for a young wife, when he was so infirm he had to be moved out of one room into another! No, not Mr. Long ; Mr. Gerlimore, if she had to marry an old man. If Mr. Gerlimore had not responded to her appeal *à l'extremité* she would have been miserable. The excitement almost banished Ephraim Sparrow from her thoughts. She began to enjoy the burlesque. When her father returned she had a smiling face, the tea table

was set, she had donned the dove-silk gown, her father's gift, and the gold chain shone on sheen. Her father eyed her with pride, amusement, secret satisfaction; he did not dream that she was laughing at him, and turning him inside out.

'How fine thou art!' said he; 'one 'ud think thou wast a lady. Should you like to be a lady?'

'It would depend,' answered she, demurely.

'Long wanted me to stop there, but I wouldn't. I mud as well spend my bit o' spare time wi' my baens. A fine owd fellow is Long, and well off. I'd no idee he was so warm. A pity the gout lays hold on him so.'

'Mr. Gerlimore is as owd as he is, and look how brisk he is. He has no gout much——'

'Mr. Gerlimore eats nowt; he isn't hearty; he may go off; he's no inside——' but Cowlamb forgot himself; if Iphis married Mr. Long, one inducement must be that he would

soon go the way of all flesh; 'but Long can't last many more years. I've known hearty fellows go off in a twinkling. When wer time comes,' observed the farmer, piously, 'we all ha' to go.'

'I like Mr. Gerlimore best,' said Iphis, mischievously.

'Why, what does t' see so much in him,' queried Cowlamb, puzzled with her; 'he's a thin owd scribe got to be, and a long thin nose and little rat eyes and queer in his ways, a real eccentric man. Now Long does wear clothes that isn't owd-fashioned.'

'I like Mr. Gerlimore best,' persisted Iphis, 'he's a gentleman.'

'After all the tales about him?' suggested her father.

'Well,' persisted she, 'he doesn't use such dreadful words as Mr. Long. Mr. Long swears ivery other word sometimes.'

'I've heard Parson Gerlimore rap out a fine oath,' contested her father; 'it's a bad thing, I'll awn, is swearing.'

'But Mr. Gerlimore's swearing isn't so shocking as Mr. Long's, father.'

'Why, thou must be sweet on *him*,' said Cowlamb, staring.

'Father!' deprecated Iphis, with histrionic art and emphasis, 'how can you talk so?' Iphis shaded her face with her hand; her face was scarcely under control.

Cowlamb laughed at what he considered her simplicity.

'Why, I'm suer thou sticks up for him so, I began to think things. Art tha going to hev him now?'

'No,' said Iphis, stoutly, 'not that I know of.'

'What should ye think of such an owd man for a husband, eh?'

'I might do worse than marry Mr. Gerlimore,' declared Iphis, still determined to champion her favourite.

'He would ha' to ast thee first, and that's not likely,' said Cowlamb, sceptically.

Iphis could scarcely contain herself.

'What should ye say to Mr. Long? He's a dele the most money. Mr. Gerlimore has a good living, bud I'll uphold it he ends his as he goes on. Long's been a money-maker. He's no end o' money.'

'I don't think I could fancy him.'

'You don't knaw what you could do if you would.'

'Why, father, you wouldn't like me to marry such an owd man?'

'Thou might do a deal worse.'

'Or better,' said Iphis, obstinately.

'Why, hast tha another string to thy bow?' asked Cowlamb, losing his temper.

Iphis was silent. Could she mention the other strings? To breathe Ephraim's name would be treason, to bring forward Mr. Gerlimore's would provoke ridicule, incredulity.

'Is Sam tired of me, too?' asked Iphis, sadly.

'Tired? no, not he! Who else was tired o' thee?'

It was a hard thrust, and Cowlamb felt it.

He had brought her away from her home, was he alienating her affection from him? He had done all for the best.

'Ain't I said,' importuned he exculpatorily, 'when thou got tired o' Sam thou'd a good home to come to? I wanted thee to stand at Sam's back. He spoke fair; he said he should be better wi' thou here, he wanted thee to come, he asked for thee. Hesn't he been doing the thing that's reight?'

'He hasn't been much amiss,' said Iphis. It was her first admission that he had been amiss at all. Cowlamb did not ask for anything more. He remained silent. He felt strangely discouraged. What would be the end? Sam must soon turn, or it would be a downhill course for him. Sam's proclivities had been swept from the farmer's mind by the new excitement. At the first he was startled when Mr. Long opened his budget; he had some repugnance to his child being bargained for, but his old neighbour's concise statement of his wealth, his admission that he could not

expect to trouble any one long in this world, that his property real and personal should revert to her, unhampered, reached Cowlamb's greatest weakness. The inheritance was cheaply obtained if Iphis could only divest herself of a woman's foolish notions, but she was almost too young to know what was best for herself.

'A few more years on her back,' thought he, 'she'll know the vally o' money.'

And so he had almost made up his mind to force her to accept good fortune. If she was stiff and troublesome now, when old Long had gone over to the majority she would think that her father had done for the best. So Cowlamb always comforted himself when his actions even to himself appeared high-handed and tyrannical. But what puzzled him most was Iphis's bantering way of meeting him as he felt his way. He had expected obstinacy, awkwardness.

'I wonder who's put that into thy heead, about any on us bein' tired o' thee?'

'Why,' said Iphis, 'I thought *you* must be by your wanting to get me married to the first owd fellow that offers hissen.'

'I aint said anything about any owd fellow wanting to marry thee.'

'Oh!' said Iphis, 'it's all a joke then?'

'Nay, it isn't,' said Cowlamb, exasperated because sunshine seemed to come in her face crassly. 'I'm not given to jokes. But I thowt what a fine thing——'

'Hasn't Mr. Long been asking you?' demanded Iphis.

Cowlamb was astonished at the change of front. She had seen his hand from the first; she had played with him. She was much shrewder than he took her to be.

'It is so, then?' said Iphis, sternly.

'It is and it isn't,' stammered Cowlamb.

'Why, thou seemed main anxious for me to go,' resumed he, 'and I think thou might do a dele worse. Some day thou'd look behind nobody, 'cause he'd leave thee ivery penny for thee to do what thou liked with. He says,

what's done wi' it when he's deead he nayther knaws nor cares. Thou can marry agean or owt. He wants somebody to stand by him for a year or two ; he's nayther kith nor kin ; nobody that cares a button for him.'

'I shouldn't care a button for him,' said Iphis, coolly.

'That wouldn't matter, Iphis—Long says so.'

'If it had been Mr. Gerlimore,' mused Iphis.

'Bother Mr. Gerlimore ; it isn't him. He wouldn't be able to do half so well by thee.'

'I couldn't bear Mr. Long, with his nasty ways.'

'I'm suer he's a clean owd man. He allus looks to me as if he'd come out of a bandbox.'

'Because he's well tended. I won't have *him*.'

'Don't be foolish, Iphis, or thou'll live to rue else. It caps me what's come ower young folks nowadays. When they're bread's but-

tered for 'em they won't eat it; they mow about an' let somebody else bite at it.'

'Why can't he marry Miss Grinstead? She'd take care on him.'

'It's just that—that,' stammered Cowlamb. 'Why, poor owd chap, she'd care less about him than thou would. She'd hev a army o' poor ralations about her heels, and that would drive Long crazy.'

'Well, I an't going to have him; I'd go out to sarvice first.'

'Thou shalt go out to sarvice, then,' muttered Cowlamb, exasperated. He was well aware that he ought to control himself, be cool and plausible, instead of losing his temper. He recovered himself a little. 'Now, think on it, Iphis. I don't want thee to make up thy mind all at once; think o' thy futur; thou'd be a rich lady, thou might ride in a four-wheeler. He said he'd buy one and a pair o' ponies, and thou'd ha' no need to soil thy hands.'

Iphis saw by this that opposition or in-

tractability would only increase her father's liking for the proposal.

'Thou used to be pleased wi' Mr. Long. When thou was a baen, anytime thou'd give him a kiss for sixpence.' Cowlamb had a hard laugh, and boisterous. Iphis remembered it now with shame and disgust. She wondered how she could ever have brought herself to such a lowering freedom.

'I only made believe.'

'Nay, now, I seen thee wi' my awn eyes.' Cowlamb laughed again, this time more naturally. His other laugh came in only when he was treated grossly, contradicted flatly, or rebelled against utterly.

'I wouldn't, now,' said Iphis, 'I'd rather ha' Joe Bee than him.' And Joe Bee was one of her antipathies. He was clownish and uncontained, and *mal apropos*.

'Well, I should have had nothing to say against Joe; no,' said Cowlamb impressively, 'they're careful folks. Bee's been a man wi' a good look-out, and brought up his baens to

work. But, sithee,' here Cowlamb's voice drew the comparison, 'when thou comes to think o' Long!'

Iphis was glad that Sam came in, and the persecution ceased. Sam and her father began to talk of the morrow, prospects of prices. Sam's wants were his father's wants. But Iphis did not heed their talk. She was too full of her ogre, for ogre to her Mr. Long was now. She was not tempted, neither with his promises nor future presents. The proposition was odious. The idea of marrying Joe Bee to get out of this scrape was not contemplated seriously by her. She had always looked upon Joe as an oaf. But she would go over and see the Bees on the morrow, when her father and brother were away. Probably her native wit was stirring—unrecognised as yet by her—to create a diversion whereby Mr. Long would be shelved.

'Now, then,' said Farmer Cowlamb to his daughter, as she assisted him with his coat, 'don't be soft. Remember what I've teld thee.'

She felt thankful when Sam and her father were gone.

The Bees' farmhouse was more modern than Sam Cowlamb's and less. A large family had been brought up in it, many girls, several boys, and Bee pater's great jest was naming his house the 'Hive.' All the lads save Joe had been put into farms, and Joe was waiting impatiently for his father to retire, rather impatient because some of his sisters did not find husbands, for this would expedite matters. Somehow they rather hung fire, and Joe was debarred from grasping the reins. Joe had an idea of getting married himself, if only for one grand show —driving a wife in the smartest of clothes to market once a week. Joe was not troubled with much romance; he was very sure upon one point, his bride must have a tocher.

Iphis, impulsive and prompt, reached the Bee hive and was ushered into the best room, much against her inclination. It was a room held sacred from everyday pollution; only

when company came were the blinds drawn up and the embargo raised. Everything in the room was new, grand, bright, and substantial, but scarcely an idea of unison, repose, or comfort. The newness and spotlessness was oppressive. It was a fearful business taking a chair.

'Where's Joah?' shouted Mrs. Bee in the exuberance of her 'spirits.' 'I want Joah!'

'Now sit down, baen,' said Mrs. Bee, encouraging Iphis by planting herself in one of her chairs, elbows out, palms on her knees. Iphis almost felt frightened at the uncouth woman's strident voice and unwomanly habits. She could give an inventory of every wen and mole that showed on face and arms; gone further—black alpaca dress, white bibbed apron, floury—Mrs. Bee was cake-baking when Iphis arrived—black cap with red rose, rather tumbled, having done duty before in a bonnet.

'It's a black alpaca,' said Mrs. Bee, explanatory; 'I bowt it when Bee's mother

died; it was a comfort when she did go; she was just a handful—— Ah, here's Joah. Now, Joah, here's Iphis Cowlamb dropped in agean; it seems like owd times.'

'Joah' grinned as amiably as a baboon. He intended his expansive face to express pleasure and satisfaction.

Joe sat down on a wool-worked chair covered with holland. He knew under the circumstances there would be no complaint from 'mother,' and he endeavoured to appear nonchalant, as if being seated on wool-work chairs was an everyday occurrence with him.

'When Bee and me goes an' leaves Joah in the farm, we s'll tek them there chairs—we shan't leave him 'em.'

'I'll buy some a sight better,' grinned Joe.

''Lizbeth worked them, an' they'll be hers. It won't be fair no other way.'

'No,' returned Iphis, uncomfortable under 'Joah's' stare and stereotyped grin. His

grimace seemed to affect his mother. She shook her fat sides with convulsive laughter.

'Now, Joah, doant put more on this mornin' than ya can tek off at night. Why, Iphis, thou used to play the pianner; go an' play it; our lasses never touched it since they left off school. Ya want to play it, I knaw—ah! such softness—oh, well, do as t' likes, we hadn't goin' to force folks. It's not a dele o' use payin' for extrys, so my man says, an' he's nearly allus reight.'

'I never cared for a piano much,' said Iphis, conscientiously.

'No, thou'rt one o' th' reight sort; thou'd make a proper farmer's wife, an' Joah 'ill be wantin' a wife some o' these days.'

'Now, mother,' bashfully deprecated Joe, approvingly.

'An' Joah's been about i' the world, he hes; he's been up to London, that he hes. Last cattle show, aint ye, Joah?'

'Heigh,' said Joe, 'an' it's a dear place an' all. They hardlins gies ye enough to eat

there. I could eat two or three o' their dinners an' come agean.'

'Thou seed strange sights o' nights,' suggested 'Joah's' mother, desirous that her son should show to the best possible advantage. 'What was that place thou seed the last night?'

Here Joe was disappointing. He threw his head back, the smile vanished from his face. The name escaped him. To him this was a serious misfortune. Probably he would sink in Iphis Cowlamb's estimation because of such forgetfulness.

'Oh, the name doesn't matter,' said Iphis, considerately.

'No more it does,' said Mrs. Bee, giving a helping hand.

'It was a grand place,' said the overpowered Joe, 'but I couldn't see nowt in it. There was such a "fog" they called it, "mist" we call it; and I couldn't get a seat nohow. I says to one fellow, "If ye please, sir, would ye sit on a bit?" But he niver spoke, but

stared straight i' front on him. So I says to another set agean him, "If ye please, sir, would ye make a bit o' room ; I axed this gentleman, but he's deeaf, I think." Blowed if he didn't stare straight afront on him, as if he was deeaf an' all. So I waits a minute, an' I see how it was, and then I says to em' both, "Ya'd be shoved on if ya was in our country."'

'Thou wouldn't ha' made any bones about shovin' 'em on, Joah,' suggested Mrs. Bee.

'Ah, I didn't knaw how many mates they mud hev about. 'Here's no sense i' kicking up a row in a strange place.' Joe shook his head sapiently.

Mr. Bee introduced himself, but he would come no further than the door jamb, disregarding his wife's most pressing entreaties. He was as reserved as his wife was loquacious.

'No,' answered he, with a natural and appalling grimness. 'I never comes no furder'n here.'

'It's nobbut his way,' excused Mrs. Bee.

'Why, Joah's ventured in,' exclaimed Mr. Bee in surprise. 'He's a bold lad, is Joah,' declared Mr. Bee, admiringly.

'Well, I mun be going,' declared Iphis, now as anxious to make her escape. 'I thought I'd run over while father and Sam were out. I had nowt on particular this morning.'

'I'm sorry our lasses are out a visitin',' said Mrs. Bee. 'If we'd ha' nobbut knawn you'd been coming. Here's nobbut Joah at home.'

'An' me an' thou,' corrected Mr. Bee, determined to be exact.

'We don't count thou and me,' affirmed Mrs. Bee.

'Oh, very well,' assented he, agreeably.

'I shall be glad to see Elizabeth and Polly ower at our house.'

'I'll tell 'em when they come home,' promised the gratified mother. 'They hadn't danch' (dainty), said she, proudly.

Iphis rose to go. Joe rose up with a

favouring grin to let her pass, but Iphis would not vouchsafe him a look. All the way home she was anathematising herself for renewing acquaintanceship.

'That lout of a "Joah,"' muttered she, mimicking their outrageously broad idiom. She was very decided. 'I shan't have Joe Bee,' said she, uncompromisingly.

CHAPTER 20.

A DEFAULTER.

Haveluck fair was generally well over before noon. The best business was done earliest. The later hours of the morning were noisy with the 'riff-raff,' the screw horse-dealers, the 'Pepper' gang, the nondescripts and vagabonds, quiet hitherto, noisily conspicuous now opportunity offered. A greenhorn caught, if he did not become the purchaser of some broken-winded, chest-foundered, or impotent animal, was only too glad to escape their toils with a toll. Sometimes a Tartar engaged these swashbucklers, but then the glory of worsting them in their own field was attended with no little danger.

After the fair was over came the races, the money for 'plates' and 'purses' and 'stakes' the result of persistent efforts made by horsey votaries. It was the saturnalia. All Haveluck turned out to enjoy themselves. It was a time for families to unite, for festive enjoyment, for much eating and drinking. For a radius of some miles it was Haveluck feast; it was Teselby and Drinsey, and the feast of half a dozen other neighbouring villages besides. A fair excuse for a break in a year's routine. Inn yards that day filled with traps, and towards noon the town was stirred from end to end with the arrivals, the streets presenting a gay and animated appearance.

After they had dined, Farmer Cowlamb ruthlessly ordered out the trap to return home. Sam was inclined to stay. He would have stayed had not his father been with him. It seemed a hardship to Sam leaving such a stir, but then Sam never questioned his father's will. The old man led the recreant by the nose when he was with him.

The fields devoted to Haveluck races were entered from the road they would pursue. As they were approaching them Sam slackened rein, and both the men's eyes looked towards the crowds, the 'grand stand'—an erection of scaffold-poles and planks—the shooting galleries, the negro minstrels, the itinerant nut and gingerbread hawkers, and the canvas-covered stalls. It was a gay scene. Betting men were assembling in hats and coats of astonishing hues. Every now and then a trap would dash past them, chafing Sam's mare, but he checked her, wishing to prolong his journey past. A groom on foot led a racer clothed. The foot-road was crowded with pedestrians hurrying forward after heavy dinners, cigars and pipes and tasselled sticks the order of the day. Children replete with pocket money, terribly anxious to spend. Women and young girls laughing, chattering, some bold, some timid. Farmer Cowlamb looked on with a cynical curl of his lip, then looked at the unconscious Sam, in whose face

reigned paramount interest and regret. Secret satisfaction and triumph animated Farmer Cowlamb's. If he had not accompanied Sam, Sam would have been head over heels in all this mischief and foolery. What a thing it was that lads brought up in the way his had been should show such a hankering after the fleshpots of Egypt! But the farmer was suddenly startled and recalled to himself. It was as if a breath of Willowby air had fanned his cheek, and not the salt breeze that blew from the water off Haveluck. Sitting on the top ledge of a gate was a figure sufficiently familiar; yet, no, he must be mistaken. The individual he was thinking of must be at Willowby. He was tied and bound, and was not likely to have liberty at Haveluck races when he was debarred even, as Cowlamb knew, from attending the festivities at Moortown feast. Cowlamb could not rest without satisfying himself; he had half a mind to get out of the trap, but there was no need, it was the black-

smith's apprentice, there was no mistaking the round face and sparkling countenance of his bugbear. There he sat, nursing a bundle tied in a red cotton handkerchief, watching the passers-by and the vehicles with a curious almost boyish interest. He saw the farmer and his son, but golden Phœbus shining in his eyes, he did not recognise the source of all his miseries. Ephraim was well aware that to Cowlamb he owed increased severity of treatment. Irritation against a captious master had culminated in a desperate resolve. Ephraim was absconding. His first idea had been enlistment, but on reaching Haveluck he found soldiering a much more prosaic undertaking than he had imagined it to be. He met with a surfeited private, full of woes, possessed with an abject hatred of his sergeant.

Ephraim tried his trade in the town, but his inexperience went against him and work was slack, the pleasure time even militated

against employment. One foreman had a shrewd surmise that he was a runaway apprentice, covering Ephraim with confusion and raising the bogey of alarm. He must seek the country again, he would not ask again in Haveluck. What more natural than that he should drift with the pleasure-seekers? But his funds were at a low ebb; after satisfying humbly the cravings of appetite, he found himself with a solitary sixpence in his pocket. To be superior to the world's frown a man must own a pocket-knife, a piece of string, and a shilling. But Ephraim remembered the hopefulness of a Willowby wight, who declared that work always rolled into him when he had spent his last sixpence, and to ensure it it was wisdom to go to the alehouse and get out of the last piece of plate without procrastination. Ephraim's poverty did not weigh heavily upon his mind; he had forgotten the curt foreman, he sat oblivious of future demands upon his resources. The stream of people, the diversity of face and

apparel interested and diverted him. Every one was light-hearted, and Ephraim caught the tone. The young fellows chaffed him—he was countrified ; but Ephraim had ready rejoinders, they were bound to admit that he was not slow-witted. But all his *insouciance* vanished in a moment. Something like a panic possessed him. Had he comprehended that Farmer Cowlamb had just passed him? No, he was not afraid of Farmer Cowlamb returning to Willowby with news of him. His bogey was akin to Joel Towse's. At an angle of forty-five degrees he became aware of a police-constable making for him. The light shone on the badge of his helmet, and Ephraim was riveted on the gate, as if fascinated with this symbol of law and order. He was prepared to make a clean breast of his offence and promise to go quietly. What was the use of remonstrance? Ephraim felt his knees tremulous before the policeman spoke ; an excited gulp in the throat hindered Ephraim from speaking the words which were

ready for utterance. The policeman, however, forestalled him.

'You'd better get off that gate, young man, it's not allowed; there's been a goodish many complaints about chaps sitting on gates o' Sundays. You'd better get off, young man.'

What a relief it was, to be sure! The policeman's tone was even persuasive. He spoke considerately.

'Oh, I'll do that, sir,' said Ephraim, dropping down with alacrity. 'I didn't know I was doing wrong.'

'Where are you going, young man?'

'I'm looking for work,' replied the runaway, freely.

'What! on that gate?' Ephraim was greatly taken up with the policeman's jocularity. 'Aren't you going to the races?'

'I think I will,' answered Ephraim; 'iverybody else seems to be going.'

'You don't belong here?'

'No.'

'On the tramp—well, don't get into mischief—drunk—and if you have any money, keep your hand on it.'

'I don't think anybody 'll rob me,' declared Ephraim, hilariously.

'Better men than you have been cleaned out,' returned his mentor, reprovingly; whereat Ephraim was a little abashed.

If Ephraim had looked up the road he would have seen some one watching the *rencontre* with some apparent interest. A trap was stationary and one of its occupants intently waiting for the issue. Then, as Ephraim followed in the wake of the pleasure seekers, the trap went on too, the mare shortly after urged into a trot.

Ephraim on the race-ground was soon confused by the shouts of a mounted horseman. Looking to his left he beheld a ruck of horses coming at a fierce gallop. He was crossing the course, and was freely sworn at when out of danger. He made his way to where the people were densest. There was

a perfect babel of shouting, but 'three to one bar one' was a sentence full of mystery to him; less so the frantic shouts of the spectators—

'Sultan wins! Sultan wins!'

By the excitement the horse was evidently a local one. Beyond the interest that even the most pulseless spectator evinces at a closely-contested effort, Ephraim was little moved. Other excitement followed. A welsher bolted, and a crowd chased him until he jumped into a wide brook. The drinking booths began to be patronised; those who had grievances aired them, those who had lost having a logic for the circumstance, those who had won being equally argumentative, somewhat hard upon the victims of misplaced confidence, and aggravatingly hilarious. Ephraim unwittingly found himself inextricable in a dense circle, sheltered from outside observation by the canvas of a booth. Looking over the shoulders of those before him, he observed a table covered with oilcloth painted

like a dial, horses red and black. Silver was deposited, the arrow was spun, its stoppage eagerly watched. Those who had money on the particular colour seemed to have their stake returned to them increased a hundredfold. Ephraim's eagerness seemed to precipitate him forward ; he was not aware that way was made for him. Again he saw the operation. His hand covered the solitary sixpence. The same man won again, the tableholder paying politely. Ephraim deposited his sixpence ; the arrow revolved, seemed to pause, then slowly passed Ephraim's colour. Ephraim, disconsolate, struggled out of the crowd. As he was emerging he heard a couple of men talking.

'What a plant! They can't see through it. The man who won belongs to the party. I saw him come on the course with them.'

'I thought they would have allowed that lad to win to draw him on.'

'Maybe his last coin. They can tell their men. Ah! here's a policeman.'

Ephraim looked round to see what would be done, but the men and the board had vanished as if by magic, and the crowd was dispersing. Another race was imminent, the bell was ringing, and the numbers were up. Ephraim felt more humiliated at being considered a greenhorn. Stranded, he began to consider that if he meant to push on it would not help him staying on the racecourse until nightfall. If he found no shelter he must sleep rough. He had no particular object in view beyond finding work; no plans. He had followed this road because all the townspeople were seeking their pleasure this way.

He walked on some miles without touching a village. A miller's cart came jogging along, a solitary driver sitting on the tail door. The driver pulled up.

'Where bee'st tha goin'?'

'On here,' returned Ephraim.

'Wilt ta ride?'

Ephraim declared his willingness to do so.

'I niver pass onybody when I've a empty

cart,' vouchsafed the Samaritan. 'I been on the road mysen. Where art ee goin?'

This was a question difficult to answer. Ephraim could only ask if there were any smithies about.

'Furder on. They comes two days a-week to a stiddy gain to our mill; farmers round about bring their hosses. There's a blacksmith keeps two or three hands at Wesselby; there's some big farmers close to. Thou'll come to a guide-post soon, and which-iver way thou takes thou'll come to a place where there's a smith. Dost smoke?'

'I aint a pipe,' said Ephraim, thoughtfully.

'Thou'rt a rare chap not to carry a gun.'

'I can do ayther with or without,' answered Ephraim.

'I likes a bit o' bacca. They're unsociable beings that don't smoke. When you're out by yoursen it's company. I go miles. Our mill's in a odd place.'

'D'ye take flour to Haveluck?'

'No, get away wi' thee. They can git it grund there. I been to take our maister's dowter to the railway; she's gone to a place. They've nobbut her, and they weant let her hev a young man, so she's gone out to sarvice. I never knew sich a thing i' my life. She's been at boarding-school, and they've nobbut her. Sithee, here's a pipe.'

'Why didn't you court her?' asked Ephraim, mischievously.

'Me?' ejaculated the cadger in surprise. 'Humph, she'd niver ha' fancied me; besides it ud be as much as my place is worth. I hadn't such a fool as to chuck up a good place.'

They smoked on for some time in silence, the springless cart lurching monotonously with every stroke the horse made. Ephraim was nearly jerked off his perch by the miller suddenly reining up.

'I go down this lane. Good night, lad. Go straight on till thou comes to cross roads.'

Ephraim had fallen among thieves; he had met with a Samaritan.

A happy section of humanity can, in the face of trials most depressing, preserve an enviable serenity. The future is not dense with apprehension. Ephraim would have been quite cheerful but for the fear of being caught and sent back to Willowby. The potent indenture was a bond as despotic as Shylock's. A year of service longer and he would have been free. He walked on briskly; a weasel ran along the footpath before him, then sprang into the hedge-bottom. At any other time Ephraim, with all the fervour of a naturalist, would have sought its habitat. The day was closing with gusts of wind, the dust from the road rising in little eddies, powdering the hedgerows and roadside herbage, suggesting rain to the impressionable mind of the wayfarer. He began to think that he must have put some miles between him and Haveluck, thanks to the timely lift in the miller's cart. As opportunely a milestone seemed to

rise up to inform him—from Haveluck, 9 miles; to Dogbury, 14 miles. Where was Dogbury, and what sort of a town or village would Dogbury be? There were no intermediate villages named. This would be an old coach road. He would scarcely reach Dogbury that night if he made for it. He had passed hamlets away from the road. He began to be tired, but the miller's cadger had advised him to push on until he came to a guide-post, and then strike out. At last he saw it before him, some distance ahead, a fir-wood the background. He quickened his pace, but it seemed to take some reaching; before reaching it he had to descend twice and ascend again. You may walk ten miles towards Treminster fancying the next hill surmounted you will not be far distant from the cathedral, but there comes another toilsome hill, and another, and another, and another after that.

It had a rakish look this out of the way *nota bene*. The post was surmounted with a

bottomless bucket, the top of the post gleaming out like a graceless vagabond's white poll, a rim of the bucket hanging on one of its arms. Ephraim read first one then another. To Haveluck—to Crazelound—to Dogbury—to Snailhorn.

People may have too much choice at times. Ephraim could come to no conclusion. One road was as good as another to him. He rested against the guide-post cogitating. The wind blew in among the fir-boles ; it seemed a different world in among the dark trees. It had all the weirdness of an unexplored forest. He stood facing the wood with its dim and unsoliciting light and sombre shadow. It seemed to have a privacy resenting intrusion. Tiny rabbits, with soft, innocent eyes, regarded him timidly, ready to scamper at his first movement. Ephraim suddenly jerked his stick into the air, giving it a spinning motion. Whichever way the ash plant indexed, he would be guided by it. It came down again heavily, bounced over, and glided

some distance away from him. Ephraim walked steadily towards it, and regarding it for a moment, turned to look at the guide-post—To Snailhorn. Ephraim picked up his stick, shouldered his bundle, a victim to his fate.

CHAPTER 21.

A SURPRISE.

'WHAT, GREG! What, Fan!' So in the old farce two servants, old lovers, recognise each other with mutual surprise and satisfaction.

Ephraim Sparrow sat in Snailhorn Church, his back to the wall. Unobserved he had seen Iphis Cowlamb enter and proceed to her pew under the pulpit. As the service proceeded Ephraim began to have a feeling that the Rev. Mr. Gerlimore treated Iphis as delegate for the congregation; he looked at no one else during prayers, and when he came to his sermon he read it to her, a benevolent expression playing about his mouth. Mr.

Gerlimore bent forward, caught her eye, smiled, and his eyes, keen and sharp, were softened with a glow of light, encouraging confidence. She must have faith, and fall back upon him. Ephraim thought it odd of this old parson.

The sermon over, the parish clerk marched to the door, and holding his snuff box in his hand two or three old fellows dipped in their fingers. Miss Grinstead said it was a shameful profanation of a sacred edifice. But Mr. Gerlimore set a bad example, for he always helped himself freely, telling a story of a man who carried a pea in his pocket to indent his thumb, his wife not allowing her husband to carry a snuff-box. He thus had further regalement.

Miss Grinstead was stepping forward when Iphis caught sight of Ephraim standing sheepishly on the grass. Rules of politeness went to the winds. Iphis forgot that such a person as Miss Grinstead was in existence. But the old lady heard Iphis's

loud ejaculations of surprise and scanned the self-conscious Ephraim critically.

'Ephraim!' cried Iphis. 'Well, I niver. Whoiver would ha' thought o' seeing you here!'

But Ephraim looked so mysterious, Iphis lowered her voice. She felt how fortunate it was that Sam scarcely ever came to church now.

'What are you doing here to-day? It's a long way fra Willowby. How did you come? Did you walk?'

Iphis had a torrent of words. She was intensely gratified at what she imagined a mark of his devotion, coming all the way from Willowby to see her, and pitching upon the church for the *rencontre*. How could she ever have so misjudged him as to believe that for a harsh word, and her own coquettish conduct, he would give her up?

His eyes travelled one way, then another, and he looked behind him before he spoke.

'I been here three or four days. I've run away,' whispered Ephraim, hoarsely.

'But you was bound?' said Iphis with some concern.

'I brokken lowse,' replied he with a comical, devil-may-care gleam in his eyes.

'But if they find out where you are they'll fetch you back, Ephraim, and maybe put you in the lock-up.'

'I s'll run away agean.'

Iphis laughed. Such wilfulness was delicious.

'Well,' said she, reassuringly, 'I shan't write home and let them know you're here. Father would go right away to blacksmith.'

'I've tried to stop,' said Ephraim, earnestly, 'for faither's sake. I knaw he'd be cut up. And Bob——' A tear came into his eye. 'You didn't knaw about Bob?'

'No,' said Iphis.

'He got drownded. They ordered a lot on 'em out in a ship that turned bottom up'ards. There was hundreds on 'em

drownded. Not one on 'em saved. I was that miserable that letter comin' fra faither, I thowt I'd 'list for a sowjer, but I was teld plenty at Haveluck about sowjering.'

'I'm glad you didn't,' said Iphis.

'I thowt maybe you'd gen me up.'

'What made you think so?'

'I thowt you was sweeter on Bob than me.'

'I did think a dele about him,' confessed Iphis, naively, 'bud not so far as that.'

'Bob was a finer chap than me.'

'Ephraim, they sent me here to get me out o' your way.'

'It's your brother that has the farm?'

'I can do as I like with him,' said Iphis, confidently.

Some awkwardness of habit prevented Ephraim from soliciting a revival of the old understanding, but it was fully understood by both that mutual regard and attachment had been held inviolate. There were grassy lanes where they could walk without fear of curious

eyes noting for future comment the eccentricities and abandonment of lovers. Iphis resigned herself to the joyous freedom of the situation. All reserve went to the winds. Love in any station is feverish when prohibition is the fiat. When assignations are made the stolen pleasure is all the sweeter. Iphis felt herself triumphant in her exile. She was easily persuaded to walk on with her lover, although during that walk together little was said by either. If marriage had been contemplated by Iphis, it had scarcely shaped itself definitely in Ephraim's mind. Some peril, peril of a rival, must come to make Ephraim decided. But now with Iphis it only needed sterner reprobation or threat of compulsory marriage to propel her into Ephraim's arms.

Sam was waiting for her impatiently. The tea-table was set, bright with china and the silver tea-pot. The solid furniture and warm, sombre colour of carpet and hangings gave an air of great comfort and ease. Sam lay back in the easy chair, his huge limbs

crossed, the *Mercury* crumpled on the floor, the house cat at his feet, blinking with domestic content. A lithograph of the steward of the estate, as pompous in expression as his 'Yrs. faithfully,' appeared as if taking an approving estimate of Sam's solvency. Sam had dozed and dozed again, until, feeling cramped, he began to wish that Iphis would put in an appearance.

'They kept you late-ish,' said Sam, when she appeared. 'You called in somewhere?'

'Nay, I didn't,' answered she, 'I just went for a walk; I'd no idea it was so late.'

'It's no matter,' said Sam cheerfully, 'only one's so used to hevin' tea sooner on a Sunday than on a wottleday. It doesn't seem nat'ral to one to be put past. O' Sundays one's as idle as a dog's hairy,' said he, yawning.

'I wean't be a minute.'

Sam stooped and picked up his paper, occupying himself with smoothing out the creases. He felt it an offence against his

housekeeper's ideas of order and neatness. While she was away, he re-read in a desultory way the advertisements of sales and other notices agricolean. Sunday was a great reading day with Sam; those portions of the paper he skipped on first receiving it he diligently read, for time hung heavily on his hands on Sundays. He could not work as on week-days, although at intervals he haunted the farm buildings, looking over half-doors at calves and feeding beasts, draught-horses and store pigs. And they seemed to understand that he cared for them.

When Iphis came down Sam had already placed himself at the table, and was looking as distrait as *un homme ennuyé* would.

'There's a great ship lost, and four hundred on 'em in it; it wembled ower. They call it the "Captain." Did ta see it?' said Sam, gaping.

'No,' answered Iphis.

'I wonder if anybody 'll come in?' mused Sam.

'I'd knaw,' answered Iphis; 'I hope them Bees woant. I hope Mr. Gerlimore will.'

'Why not them Bees? I heerd tell o' thou going to see 'em, when we went to Haveluck.'

'They make one feel duller. Joe's that soft, and his mother seems so vulgar. I used to wish she was my mother when I was a baen, she used to—to fuss one so. But she seems hateful now, and Mr. Bee looks so solid. I used to laugh at him when he spoke, but now I can't see what I saw to laugh at.'

'Joe's a likely chap—a good farmer,' interpolated Sam. 'He seld a butcher a yow that had dropped her wool, for a fat lamb. Her wool came curly agean, iverybody that seed it said what a fine lamb it was, and it was a wether. That wasn't dusty.'

But Iphis was not taken with this picture of 'Joah's' shrewdness.

'I shan't go there any more,' said she.

'Thou'rt a rum lass for picking folks up and setting 'em down agean. Well, I don't

want Joe to come and fetch thee away,' said Sam, laughing.

'You needn't be scared o' that,' said Iphis, with curt disdain.

'Oh, did ta see the blacksmith at church?' inquired Sam. 'I meant telling thee to tell him we want wer harrows sharpening; they ought to ha' been done afore. He's got a man. We s'll git things done now.'

Sam spoke so guilelessly, Iphis felt herself a sinner. If she had not seen the smith she had seen his man.

Tea over, company came, and the Bees of all folks. Iphis had to put on a semblance of welcome, and Sam chuckled and laughed to himself, though there still lingered a 'nettled' feeling; the Bees had openly criticised his goings on at various times. Sam had once been favourably looked upon there, their eldest daughter they once fancied had made some impression upon Sam. Mr. Bee looked a little 'squance' (askance) at first, but he soon recovered himself, for Sam Cowlamb was

not of a maliceful sort. The two daughters were with him, bouncing country lasses, ruddy, with dark deep-set eyes, and the busts of matrons. Elizabeth was impetuous, saying everything that came into her head, while Polly sat still, smiling, suggesting terribly that nothing did ever come into hers. Polly carried the palm for looks, Elizabeth for loquacity. Iphis had not a point in common with either.

'I saw you at church,' said Elizabeth. 'I wanted to ast you how you was, bud you was off by that. You know that young man that's come to the blacksmith's?'

'Yes, he comes from Willowby,' answered Iphis, coldly; 'he was a singer at our chapel.'

Iphis looked towards Sam, wondering if he had heard Elizabeth's unconsidered outburst, but Bee and he were engaged with a desperate piece of strong land.

'Then he's religious, maybe?' said Elizabeth.

'He was brought in,' acknowledged Iphis.

'It's a bad job when they get religion and fall away. Some go on worse efter than they did afore.'

'I'm suer I don't know,' answered Iphis, wishful to bring the topic to an end.

'Did you go a-walking with him?' persisted the too curious Elizabeth.

'As far as the lane end. Why, what o' that? He wodn't ha' made bold to speak if I hadn't.'

'I see,' said Elizabeth; 'I thowt you knew him, maybe; why doesn't he shave his lip? Joe wanted to hev a moustache, but faither said if he'd any such notions he mud pack and begone.'

'I didn't notice,' said Iphis, hypocritically; 'why, has he?'

'Well, its just black on his lip, I could see, and on his chin. Why, everybody in towns hes 'em. I thowt maybe he was a town chap. They can't be nice if they want to kiss you.'

'Kiss!' exclaimed Iphis, almost starting to her feet, and blushing.

'Why, men do kiss women when they're courtin',' argued Elizabeth, resenting Iphis's show of surprise.

Polly smiled and shook her fat shoulders in gleeful anticipation of becoming the idol of a lover's eye and heart.

'I don't know,' said Iphis, off-handedly.

'Well, I've been kissed, so I'll awn to it,' said Elizabeth, bravely—'at parties, you know. But then it looks soft, after the first time or two, to put your hands to your face and pretend you don't want. Why! don't you think it does? And then chaps git mad. It's not the same as if, when they met you going to market or anywhere, they were to clam hold of you, and kiss you there and then. They think nothing o' the first time or two pulling your hands away; they get one arm around your neck, and after—they no need o' that.'

'I hate so much kissing,' said Iphis, contemptuously.

'I don't, and Polly there, ah—she sits allus without a word to say for hersen, bud she's that brazened—yes, you are. Oh, she's that brazened for all she's so quiet. I don't ha' two chaps come hankering round the house! Last Sunday Stephen Body came looking for her, and 'cause she wasn't at home, he says to mother, "Is Polly at the Conference to-night, Mrs. Bee? I been to the Primitives." He'd come from Kaythorpe, and what d'ye think? Polly came up with Arnol Hazelby. Mother left 'em to theirsens, she did. She didn't know what to do wi' 'em; and Polly weant say which it's to be.'

'I don't know,' said Polly, ingenuously.

'Then you ought to know,' said her sister, sternly. It appeared to Iphis, that the younger sister's plethora of suitors exasperated Elizabeth.

'What should you do, Iphis?' asked Polly.

'I don't know what I should do wi' two.'

'She can't marry both, can she?' asked Elizabeth, still stern. 'And she'll very like make 'em both fall out with her.'

'One on 'em 'll be safe to stick to her,' suggested Iphis, confidently; whereat Polly, looking relieved, rewarded Iphis with a grateful smile. She was accustomed to look upon her more loquacious sister as a Sheban for wisdom.

'How can I tell which I'm goin' to hev?' ventured Polly. 'I think I like Steve the best. Liz may have Arnol. I don't think onybody's efter her.'

This was crushing for Elizabeth, but she rose again, bravely asserting herself. 'And not for want o' chanches, maybe.'

'Thou'rt more particular than nice,' suggested Polly, sarcastically.

Iphis grew weary at last of their interminable solicitude for a husband. It was more pronounced than her own. Iphis was relieved when the house was clear of them. Sunday was Sunday. They seemed

to bring into the house a boisterousness that clashed with the day and her own sensitive nature.

Sam, looking at his sister, could realise a gulf. Iphis's oval face, fine and delicate lips, large and intelligent eyes were strikingly brought out in juxtaposition. Her ears were like shells, her hair silky and soft, a soft and clear complexion with her light brown hair.

'They can't come up to our Iphis,' was Sam's mental thought; 'there's plenty o' substance i' little room, bud they ain't fine and clean. They ain't ears, they're lugs.'

'I'm glad they've been,' said Iphis. 'They weant come agean till I've been there, and I shan't go in a hurry.'

'They're niceish lasses,' said Sam, mischievously.

'They're little,' sneered Iphis.

'Good stuff 's lapped up i' small parcels.'

'And so 's poison,' retorted Iphis.

'Well, onybody's better than nobody, lass. Law, 'tis a lonely life living in these out-of

the-way places. Now in a town one can go out and git into company.'

'I wouldn't care to live in a town,' said Iphis, curtly. Sam, she knew, loved the town too well.

'Maybe I shouldn't. I've got used to looking after things. I feel awful when I've nowt to do. I can't sit like some folks reading a book from one hour's end to another. It seems such a waste o' time to me. I allus go to sleep over the newspaper.'

Iphis could not assert a claim for love of books. Consequently both were eaten up at times with *ennui*. Cards had been tabooed from their infancy as some outlying picket of the devil's, and both had grown up to have a suspicion and misconception of them. How these two might have spent their evenings, whiling away their time over a game of crib, for even those who love a book, when it palls, may cosily sit together over a game.

Sam went out upon his evening prowl over the contiguous home close, looking to

the sheep there; then round by the house-end to the farm buildings once more. And while he was away Iphis, in her own chamber, was dwelling upon the unexpected appearance of Ephraim Sparrow, his constancy and his past hardships. She sat upon the edge of her stately four-post bed and pondered over the possible course of events. Her father would naturally be over at Snailhorn again before long. If he discovered Ephraim so near, what would he do? Force her into marriage with Mr. Long? But then if a woman is dragged by brutal force to the church, when they have got her there they cannot force her to say 'Yes.' But her father had the power to remove her from Snailhorn back to Willowby, and Ephraim dare not return there. Would Mr. Gerlimore help her in any way? He would marry her himself, but this was coming no nearer a happy consorting with the one of her choice. Iphis speculated no further; things must take their course. She would walk out with Ephraim, if not openly, because

she had a spark of prudence, and knew there would be 'talk.' Words travel with the wind; it might waft information to Willowby, hastening catastrophe. When she got downstairs again she saw that Sam had discovered her keys, and the sideboard door was open. He was pouring liquor into a glass.

'I'm just going to hev one glass,' he said, tentatively, 'to take taste out o' one's mouth.'

'What taste?'

'The bees' honey.'

'Well, give me back my keys then, or when I want 'em I shan't find 'em.'

Under the circumstances she could not be exacting. Sam tossed her her keys across the table, intimating that he had no desire to exceed the one glass.

CHAPTER 22.

PASSION.

Days and weeks progressed. Iphis had her trysts and repaired to them, until she cared little who met her or who espied the assignations. Sam, easy soul, never troubled himself about her, the increasing habit of hers of wandering away from the house, excited neither his curiosity nor suspicion. She was only a girl, and why should she be cooped in and about the house night and day? She must have relaxation. If any one had told Sam it was a sweetheart she met, Ephraim's station would not have excited his ire or ill-will. He had married where there was money, it had palled upon him; looking back he felt

that he had been debarred some honest thing, lovely and chaste in itself. In his most miserable hours he took to drink, jovial company was irresistible.

When Sam was away at Haveluck or elsewhere, Ephraim was bold enough to venture near the house. Further emboldened he came to the house itself at last, and Iphis's courtship proceeded as properly and much more to her heart than hundreds of courtings do proceed.

But, alas! there came the catastrophe. With repeated victories we court disaster. Sam had gone to Haveluck market. He had wished for Iphis's company, but of late, to his surprise, she had shown some distaste for leaving the house. She had not seen Haveluck half a dozen times since her return to Snailhorn. Sam did not press her, he was almost glad to go alone; he could order out his horse when he chose, stay until he was the last man in the bar parlour. He made it a point to execute all her commissions first thing, then

get through his own business, then the remainder of the day was his own. No one loves gossip more than the illiterate man, buried six days out of seven in a desert of cultivation, his own house a landmark for miles. He must have a day to ventilate his ideas or open his soul for impregnation.

It would be about seven o'clock in the evening. Ephraim Sparrow stood in Sam Cowlamb's kitchen leaning against the kitchen table. It was that season of the year when, the sun having set, the earth rests in a melodious shadow, dusk imminent, but reticent. Iphis stood near to him. So near indeed that Ephraim's arm was round her waist. The soft lines of her body were unresisting. Her hands trifled affectionately with the hand of the arm that spanned her. There was something in his forge-burnt face beside the glow of health that held her captive to his will. A spice of the ineradicable daring glistened in his eyes ; his evident capacity for mischief enthralled her. The silky-brown down on his

lip merging to a curl, seemed to indicate love of pleasure, indolence, disregard of the future, and absence of settled purpose. It was this very expression which Iphis's father fought against. Farmer Cowlamb feared the ne'er-do-weel, and he at first was actuated by no other desire than that of seeing his daughter settled in a comfortable home, with a solid husband to protect her and make good use of her dowry. This rascal would be a thorn in his flesh as long as he lived, and possibly bring his child to penury. After he had done with life he could no longer stand at her back. Mr. Long had tempted Cowlamb. No young fellow came forward of the right sort, or whom Iphis would accept, and Cowlamb felt desperately anxious to see her married and out of harm's way. The money might tempt her, and in a few years old Long would be dead, and she would have gathered crumbs of sense.

'Marry old Long?' cried Ephraim, incredulously. 'I've seen him. Why, he's owd enough to be your grandfather.'

Iphis nodded. It was not the first time she had hinted to Ephraim of this offer. Now she gave her lover full details of her father's wishes and Mr. Long's plans. She refrained from mentioning Mr. Gerlimore's offer. It was so different, dictated from feelings of pity, and tendered in a fashion that won her respect. No, she could not hold him up to ridicule!

'I'se think,' cogitated Ephraim, 'your faither ud make no bones about me if I'd money, or was in a good farm—he'd ha' nowt agean me if I was Joe Bee. Maybe I've some belongings that are well off, but that's nowt; the owd chap's niver done a dele for me that I know on. He's my great-uncle, and he's well off. He bowt me a suit o' clothes once, and he's gen me a sovereign or two, but allus saying I needn't expect owt from him. I neither want him nor his money. There was nobbut Bob and me akin to him—he was mother's own uncle——'

'He's sure to leave you his money, Ephraim.'

'I moant reckon on it. They say he's well off, but maybe he's nowt.'

'If you was married maybe he would do something.'

'I wouldn't ast him,' said Ephraim sourly; 'if I couldn't addle [1] owt I wouldn't.'

'I think when they can start young folks they ought to,' reasoned Iphis, less independent. 'I'm suer father would niver ha' thowt o' refusing to help Sam or Tom.'

'But it comes to another thing—I hadn't his son,' said Ephraim, hopelessly.

Iphis looked pityingly in Ephraim's face. He had no one to lean upon. Why should her father be so bitter against him? She thought just then of her father, and the rage he would be in were he to hear of their meetings, Ephraim bold enough to enter the house. She did not fear Sam. Sam condemned the principles in which he had been educated, and would be likely to encourage another in rebel-

[1] Earn.

lion. Sam vowed if his life had to come over again money should not influence him in any way where marriage was concerned.

'Thou does think a bit about me, then?' said Ephraim, gratefully.

'I wouldn't ha' thee here if I didn't,' she returned, candidly.

He pressed her all the tighter, and was silent for a moment or two.

'And thou'd marry me? If I'd nowt but what I addled?'

'I could live where any other woman could, and make things go as far. But we can wait a bit; things maybe 'll mend. If owd Braddy knew you were here he'd send after you.'

'Nay,' answered Ephraim, confidently; 'I think he'll bother no more about me.'

Iphis's quick ears caught the sound of wheels at the house-end.

'Here's Sam,' said she, quietly. Ephraim relinquished his hold.

'Will he come in here?' asked Ephraim.

'Oh, never mind if he does,' answered she, calmly.

A footfall startled her, it was close upon them, the hand was on the door 'sneck.'

'Why, it's father!' gasped Iphis, horrified.

She threw up the window sash—it went up heavily—Ephraim clambering upon the table. At the same moment the door opened and Farmer Cowlamb witnessed the ignominious exit of the lover. At the first blush Cowlamb thought it a cupboard courter of the servant-girl's, but when he saw it was really his own girl Iphis standing near the table, agitated, nervous, and almost speechless, instantly he surmised the lover. His mind went back to Haveluck fair, that afternoon when he had observed a youth perched on a gate, exciting the interest of a police-constable.

'Was that that blacksmith's chap?' demanded her father, violently.

Iphis did not answer. The farmer looked through the open window, and beheld Ephraim

hurriedly proceeding along the brick edge of the duck pond directly in front. The crows came daily for Iphis's chickens. Sam's gun stood, unfortunately, too handy. The impetuous farmer seized it, shouldered it, and fired.

Iphis screamed, for Ephraim stumbled and fell, rolling into the water.

'Oh!' she screamed again, 'you've shot him—you've murdered him—you'll be hung! —What had he done amiss to you?' demanded she, passionately.

She spurned her father away from her. In her face was horror, despairing detestation, unforgiving resentment. The farmer lowered his gun, awakening as suddenly to his culpability, for a moment helpless, then as frantic as his daughter.

'What did he come here for? God bless my soul, what did Sam leave the gun about for? What mun I do? What mun I do? I niver meant it, Iphis. I niver meant to do it. I didn't know it was loaded. Was there shot in it?'

Cowlamb felt his brain iced with horror. Iphis never replied to him, and he dashed out of the house, running against Sam who was coming up, having heard the report of a gun, without being much surprised thereat.

But something in his father's face caused Sam to feel alarmed, he knew not why. Fright and horror seemed contagious. Some gleam of comprehension reached Sam's brain when he beheld Ephraim floundering in the muddy water. 'Help us out with him,' groaned Farmer Cowlamb; 'we'll get him out and larn the worst. I'd know what came ower me!'

'You didn't aim at him?' queried Sam, with some concern, and a feeling of repulsion even against his own father.

'I hardlins knaw what I did.'

Sam could see that his father was greatly alarmed, almost abject. They were two strong men. Ephraim struggled with them much like an animal ignorant of its captor's inten-

tions ; but when assured that no further retaliation was intended submitted quietly. He was taken into the farmhouse, and laid dripping on the kitchen table.

'Is he dead?' cried Iphis, clasping her hands ; 'is he hurt much ?'

'Get away wi' thee,' said her father, absently, although nervously, some of the old acrimony in his voice ; 'how can we tell till we see ?'

Iphis lingered a moment or two, and Ephraim recovering himself sat up. His faculties were not over clear yet. He had swallowed a quantity of the dirty water, and some slime from the bottom of the pond upon his clothes had not an agreeable odour.

'Is owt the matter wi' thee ?' queried Cowlamb.

'Not much, I think,' answered Ephraim, slowly, feeling of his elbows.

'What was t' doin' then to tumble in?'

Cowlamb recovered himself sufficiently to assume sternness and implacable dislike. In

his heart he was thankful that it was no worse.

'Somebody let a gun off, and I jumped so I missed my footing.'

Poor Ephraim talked as if waking from a dream. He had scarcely realised yet his position, or the capital he might have made out of it.

'Now, sithee here, Ephraim; I warned thee off my place, and thou must come here. I hadn't goin' to hev it, and that's first an' last. Fetch him a drop of brandy; it'll keep the cowd out, Iphis. When thou's drunk it thou may bundle off home. I s'll take Iphis back to Willowby. Thou's run away fra thy apprenticeship; that's a bad start. Thou moant ventur onywhere near Willowby.'

'There's no tellin',' said Ephraim, recklessly.

'I'll not ha' thee coming efter Iphis——'

'Oh, well,' said Ephraim, 'that 'll keep a bit. You'll maybe tell owd Niversweat where I am?'

'Nay, I shan't.'

'Well, I shan't give her up till she says I am.'

'Thou'rt a stupid ass for thy pains,' said Cowlamb, his passion rising; 'thou'd better get off or I shan't keep my hands off thee. If I thowt thou'd nobbut gotten a ducking, for me thou shouldn't ha' been picked out.'

That night Sam and his father had some serious conversation. Iphis was to return to Willowby. To think of this fellow coming right away to Snailhorn! No! Cowlamb would be very mindful in not letting slip the whereabouts of the absconding apprentice, and the lad dare not show himself in Willowby. Cowlamb felt himself safer as things had turned out, and hinted as much to Sam. But Sam was very blunt with his father; annoyed, too, at losing Iphis. Once in his life he combated his father's unscrupulous aims. He was inclined, to his father's increasing anger, to favour the pretensions of the lad.

'I see nowt agean the lad. He's a jolly little chap by his face. Couldn't we put him in a way?'

Cowlamb's rage was so great the veins, swollen blue on his forehead, seemed to knot and contract.

'Marry owd Long!' exclaimed Sam in astonishment, and astonishment qualified with disgust and reprobation; 'I'd sooner see her in her coffin.'

'Then thou couldn't bear to see her prosperous,' said Cowlamb, senior, cynically.

'I brought my pigs to a bad market,' retorted Sam, coolly. 'D—— the money.'

'Well, the long and the short on it is she s'll go back wi' me, of that I'm determined.'

'And what am I going to do?' inquired Sam, concernedly; 'here I got to think I was sattled fairly. I let her hev her own way; why, I do just as she tells me, like a bad lad. I try not to cross her noways. It's raither hard o' me,' complained Sam.

'What should t' do if some fine morning she was to run off wi' that chap?'

'Tek 'em in if they'd nobbut come back,' said Sam.

'A nice brew there'd be.'

'Well, I aint going to quarrel with you, father; I've my own thoughts and you have yours, only I think it's a mistake thinking so much about money and money's worth.'

And Sam, his boots unlaced, pushed them off his feet, as a signal that he did not wish to hear any more, but would prefer going to bed to sitting up hearing a doctrine widely differing from his own. Sam's stand 'gravelled' Farmer Cowlamb more than all beside, but still tended to make him all the more adamantine. He tapped at Iphis's door passing.

'Thou'll go back wi' me to-morrow morning.'

She did not reply.

'Dost hear?' urged he louder, sterner in tone,' repeating what he had said.

'Yes,' replied she, ungraciously.

'I've let thee ha' thy awn way too much, my lass.' He was hurt and miserable hearing her speak so to him, but he was still determined to bend her to his will. 'It ud ha' been better for thee if I'd stuck to thee a bit closer,' he added, his upper teeth dropping into the lower ones. When put out more than common this peculiarity was more marked.

He entered his bedroom, and got into bed with a resolution not angelical, but habit closed his eyes, determination brought him sleep.

CHAPTER 23.

CHECKMATE.

Iphis might only have been to market for all the emotion her mother exhibited. Mrs. Cowlamb was supremely passive, speaking with an almost imperceptible movement of her lips. Most people found it difficult to catch what she said when her back was turned to them, and her temper equable. 'He's browt thee home, I see—it's a cowd day—we mun begin to expect cowd weather.'

Iphis scarcely deigned a reply. She was a thwarted lioness, a dangerous gleam lurking in her eyes. Her courage still held her up. She would not allow herself to feel daunted. Inflexibly she listened to her father's threats, cajolings.

'Marry old Long? Never!'

If her father had brought her out of the reach of Ephraim, he was bringing her out of the way of the old reprobate, who might, when his gout was better, contrive to toddle down to Sam's to pay his addresses. No persuasion, no glowing picture of a luxurious future, could move Iphis out of her stony imperturbability.

At last some qualms seemed to move the farmer, or he saw the futility of prolonging the struggle; but he naturally hated giving in, and during all this troublous time he never more passionately admired and worshipped her.

Independently of persecution, it was to Iphis as if she had returned to an establishment in which she had no vested interest; Snailhorn her location. But the weeks rolled on; going to market with the week's produce seemed to go far to run her into the old groove.

The day was raw and gusty, and the

atmosphere heavy, one of the dull days before Christmas. At the foot of the lane her eyes discovered her old favourite, Joel, and a sister performing a strange vagary.

'Get up! What are you rolling about there for?' cried Iphis, in astonishment, and laughing as she had not done for weeks, as first Joel tumbled over, then the little girl. Joel was whimpering. 'Get up, you little sillies,' repeated Iphis.

'We can't,' said the little girl, laughing through her tears.

'Can't?' questioned Iphis.

'Gran'mother's pinned wer sleeves up. Joel tumbled, and when I tried to get him up I tumbled an' all.'

'Well, I niver did hear of such a thing,' said Iphis, sympathetically, but laughing until it did her heart good. 'Why, if snow had been on the ground, what then? We'll have the nasty pins out, Joel.—And how is your mother, baen?'

It struck Iphis that she ought to have

gone to see her old friend, but she had been passive and spiritless when not defiant before her father's crossed temper.

'Tell your mother I shall come on,' said Iphis at the gate; 'to-night if I can.'

It was dusk when Iphis's opportunity came for slipping out of the house.

The cottage seemed dull—Towse sat silent, the children preparing for bed with unusual soberness, Joel reciting gravely—

'Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,' but continuing—.

'Peter Pullgoose and his son,' which brought down upon him stern reprimand for his temerity in mixing up a play-hour chant with the lines of the last invocation of his evening's exercise. Young heathen, airing his depravity at such a sad hour!

Mrs. Towse had the evidence of trouble in her eyes. Iphis felt herself intruding upon some domestic sorrow.

'What's the matter, Mrs. Towse? Is there anything happened?' asked Iphis.

'Why, they've got that lad!' said Towse, apologetically.

'What lad?' asked Iphis, at sea.

'Why, Ephraim. That owd fieal fon it out where he was.'

Iphis felt greatly concerned.

'Where have they got him?' asked she.

'I' th' lock-up, my lass. The carpenter's chap—he's just out on his time—a bit of a mate he was of Ephraim's, Seth and Tadger got wind on it, and they went down to Moortown, soft lads, and Seth shouts outside the prison—"Ephraim, how dost ta like thy sitewation?" And Ephraim was that peart, he sings out—"I don't like my place; I can't sattle; I've gen 'em warning, I s'll leave when they'll let me." The wife's eyes has been watterin', but law, them lads looks on it as a fine spree. I knew Ephraim had done wrong in runnin' away. I don't hold wi' such ways. If one makes a *bad* bargain, it ought to be stuck to.'

Towse philosophised with the calmness of a man who has lived and observed.

'But then he didn't bind hissen,' argued Ephraim's tearful aunt, 'and one's sister's lad—thoff we hedn't same mother—that's dead and buried, poor thing, and nobbut him left, and to be locked up i' th' round-house.'

'Well, well,' said Towse, cheerfully, 'he'll git ower it. He owt to ha' got furder off. Seth and Tadger was like to get theirsens into trouble bawling outside. A policeman comes out, an' says he, "Young chaps, if ya don't want to git inside yersens ya'd better make yersens sca'ce. The law's like a sheep net, nice and open to look at, bud bad to break thruff." Law, I'd sooner be a dog an' bark at the devil than come afore pahson magistrates, or offend one on 'em.'

'Towse,' remonstrated his wife; 'the baens are goin' to bed; such words they oughtn't to hear.'

'One forgits one's sen. But why didn't they give a politer name as wouldn't give offence?'

'He's as many names as vartues,' said Mrs. Towse; 'if thou'd said Sathan or Beelzebub the baens wouldn't be scar'd.'

'All I say is,' said Towse, 'Ephraim owt to ha' got furder off.'

'Why he was at Snailhorn,' said Iphis. She could speak of him here in the dusky kitchen fearless of eyes directed towards her. Something in the tone of her voice intimated to them that there was something behind the scenes. 'What will they do with him?' asked she with feverish impatience; 'send him to jail?'

'No,' said Towse, soothingly, 'he'll get off wi' paying, if he can find money. He owt to hev a pound or two. He mun mind for the futur', as old Jack Lowther said: "Gentlemen, you shan't hev any more o' my custom, you charge too dear." Oh, them pahsons,' exclaimed Towse, severely, 'if what their sarvants say, they're no better than common folks at home, and as ugly. They say him as is chairman, when he dines

out, allus goes home drunk as David's sow. And a poor tramp it's allus fourteen days, and top price for drunk and disorderly. I don't hold wi' a man preaching one thing on a Sunday, forgiving his brother seventy times seven, and then havin' not a bit o' spark o' forgiveness hissen on a week-day. Why hadn't they stopped? Ephraim 'll ha' to pay, that's sartain. It ud be no saving hevin' a lawyer.'

'Do you think he can pay?' asked Iphis.

'We moan't hev him go to prison,' said Mrs. Towse, appealingly.

'How's thy money bag?' asked Towse.

'It 'll not cost more than five pounds, will it? I've a note Sam gave me when I was coming away.'

'It ud be such a shame,' said Mrs. Towse, expostulating, but not declining.

'Never mind,' stammered Iphis, 'he—he musn't have to go to Treminster.'

'It ud be a hard lodge,' said Towse.

Iphis could scarcely exist in a house where

there was so much feeling. Before they could express any gratitude she was gone.

'I said I'd break the neck o' that going to Towse's, and I will,' her father was saying to her mother.

'Here she is,' said Mrs. Cowlamb, 'you can talk to her yoursen.'

But the farmer's resolve fell still-born; he was at a loss what to say. Going to Towse's was scarcely a crime.

'Come, my lass,' said he, sternly, 'thy mother's siled the milk; thou needn't go to look. We want to go to bed.'

Bed, Iphis thought—perhaps for the first time in her life rebellion stirred her at the thought—it was all bed and work.

'I'm ready,' assented she, bitterly. 'It's not nine yet!'

'Nine!' exclaimed her father. 'It's dark. What's th' use o' sitting up for the sake o' burning candles? I hate sitting wi' nowt i' th' world to do.'

Iphis went up the stairs without candle,

and after closing her bedroom door threw herself, dressed as she was, upon her bed, covering her eyes with her hand. Was not her life an empty life? she thought crudely perhaps. To what end was she drifting? Thwarted in what seemed to her her best impulses, to be browbeaten into a narrow and sordid existence. She shrank from a life hedged in with miserable boundaries. She must be free in her home, if she was to have one of her own, not tied and bound to a log. Marry that old wretch of whom scandal whispered atrocities? If half the stories were true, he was vile. Grown-up illegitimate children, women still living on his bounty, one room in his house double-locked. A suicide's room —one wretched housekeeper—— If he had not had a hand in the tragedy, why dare he not go to rest until after midnight, and then, nightlights burning until morn and a man sleeping in his bedroom. The old man's sins had been terribly exaggerated, no doubt, but Iphis had heard the story with bated breath,

how that the old man had forced the wretched woman to smother her child in the kitchen oven. Marry him! She would die first, drown herself. If her father had heard so much, either he did not believe or had grown callous in his pursuit of money, professing Christian as he was. Had he no regard for her maidenly feelings, her modesty? He ought to be proud of her resisting. Iphis wondered if her mother was with her or against her. She had not the heart to ask her, her mother was so accustomed to coincide mutely with her husband. All his plans were fruitful; her mother had such faith in her husband's superior judgment, Iphis was fain to believe despondently that were Mr. Long's face as black as his character, her mother would consider the match a prudent and desirable one.

'I wonder if father knows——'

Her thoughts went to Ephraim in the red brick prison. She was very miserable this night; her lover lodged like a felon.

'Father'll think he might as well have left me at Snailhorn.'

Her mind went to the note. She rose up and went to her chest of drawers, and opening one, tumbled over her treasures of ribbons, snippings of silk and velvet and artificial flowers, until she came to a glove-box. In it nestled the crisp paper. It felt cheerful and powerful in her fingers. 'And I have four sovereigns beside,' she added to herself joyfully. She closed the drawer noiselessly, turned the key gently, and placed the note in her pocket. 'Folks 'll wonder who found the money,' she mused; 'and if I'm forced to have old Mr. Long—a caddy old man,' she muttered mockingly, 'I'll run clean away and niver come near ony on 'em again—so there!'

Silence was in the house, save for low, disjointed words which reached her at intervals, carrying with them the muffled sound of a man talking with sheets up to his chin. Iphis concluded that her father was

sketching out a line for his second in command.

Then all was quiet again. She became drowsy. Rousing herself with a start from her doze, she undressed in an absent fashion, and crept into her bed. But in her sleep she was troubled. The crisp note seemed endowed with impish activity. She was carrying it along a precipice to give succour, a high wind blowing—hurrying, her fingers relaxed a little, and the note, with serpentine malignancy, fluttered away. She reached forward and fell, and woke with a cry of fright. A moment's wakeful relief and she slept again—again to sup of renewed horror. She lay in her coffin, the wind, again the wind, blew more softly, with a summer breeze's petulance; the window was raised an inch, and the blind-lath beat a tattoo on the sash bottom, the white holland blind distracting her with its ripples. She even felt the breeze on her cheek and feared a chill. It was not cotton wool wherewith she was enveloped, as

she remembered to have seen a girl once at Snailhorn; it was something crisper. She essayed to move, but she was firmly placed; still there was a crackle; she could discern cabalistic markings, black and gruesome—they were Treminster notes new and clean. They had gone so far as to consider her horror of dirt even in this matter. But looking about her it was not a chamber at Willowby, nor in Sam's house. Frightened more at this discovery than at her position, she could not realise in what house she was lying. Her impression was that she was at Snailhorn. She heard doors open and close, she heard creaking feet, a blundering gait, the prod of a stick, muttering. Then a hand palsily seeking the door knob, the door was opening, the muttering became more distinct, it was swearing—an old man stood by her, his lipless mouth puckered and triumphant, his eyes demoniacally gloating over her, and yet sarcastic. He went so far as to rattle the bend of his stick on the coffin side. 'Ha,

ha!' chuckled he. His old hand reached over, clenched, impotent, but animated with devilry, shaking with increased fury. Was she not sacred in death? Was his mind good enough to mutilate her face because she had escaped him? Her eyes glanced forward and rested upon the coffin lid. There was the inscription—'Iphis Long.' She sank into despairing hopelessness. She had married him after all, and this was her only escape. She had not outlived him. Her father had sacrificed her to no purpose. Her consciousness deserted her. She sank into apathetic darkness.

Waking shortly after, the sun was shining coldly into the bedroom. She had not pulled down her blind, and the sash was not quite down. A cold air was carried into the room. Her dream for some moments continued vivid. She heard her father below stairs, other matters entered into her mind; she was concerned in matters less ideal. Gradually her dream faded from her mind,

but it had its effect. She would get down and run over to Towse's before she identified herself with the day.

Iphis got into the kitchen, where stood her father in great ill-temper. He did not look at any one in particular, but stormed at every one in general.

'No breakfast ready? Why, the kettle doesn't boil! What have you all been about? Anne, why, you was up at five o'clock! I know you heard me 'cause you spoke.'

The servant girl stood speechless before him; her eyes were heavy, she looked little more than half awake then.

Iphis took the cloth and threw it over the table deftly, and the farmer was shortly pacified with the clatter of cups and saucers.

'I told Anne you'd be i' fine fettle about your breakfast,' said Mrs. Cowlamb, in her quiet, damaging voice; 'but she was such an a season blackleading that grate, I could ha' done it myself i' half the time.'

'Have you been down?' asked Iphis, now

preparing herself for milking, donning her milking-gown.

'To be suer I hev,' retorted he, curtly. 'We'll ha' wer breakfasts afore you go now. The kettle's singing.'

'A watched kettle never boils,' said Mrs. Cowlamb, dislodging it, and methodically placing under it a couple of sticks.

'It's niver likely when you keep shiftin' it. Let it alone.'

Farmer Cowlamb was in his crassest of humours. Rising from the breakfast table, he turned to Iphis.

'Now, we'll be going.'

'Are you going with me?' asked Iphis, dismayed.

'Yis, I am. Why not? I'm going to carry the pails.'

'I can carry 'em mysen——'

'An' stop an hour or two at Towse's? I mean to break the neck o' that.'

Iphis was silent. It naturally suggested itself to her now, that her father suspected

the Towses of complicity with Ephraim in his nefarious designs. Between Farmer Cowlamb and Mrs. Towse there never had been great cordiality. Farmer Cowlamb hated gossips ; they not only were remiss themselves, but they were the cause of misspent time in others. Only her husband's ability reconciled him to tolerating her at all.

However was she to smuggle the note into Mrs. Towse's hands? Iphis was almost in despair.

Her father hoppled the unruly cow, and stood with a hand on each animal's chine. When Iphis had milked the second cow, her father took the pails and carried them off, carefully observing that Iphis followed him closely—slow in his walk, with a world of meaning in his hesitation. Iphis got to the farmhouse, the note still in her pocket.

'Is father going out to-day?' asked Iphis. She was 'siling' the milk, the creaming of the milk of the evening before to follow. She heard her father ascending the stairs.

'Nobbut to Moortown—th' magistrates' meetin'.'

'Magistrates' meeting?' gasped Iphis.

Her father was then informed! He was going to witness Ephraim's extinction and discomfiture.

'The rates,' volunteered her mother, mournful in tone. 'Him or Greenfield had to go. Greenfield sent word down last night he had to go out.'

'Oh!' said Iphis, relieved.

'He'll want his shirt,' cried Mrs. Cowlamb in sudden desperation, hurrying to a small clothes horse before the fire, and grasping the article to assure herself that it was beyond suspicion of dampness.

'Do we want owt?' questioned Mrs. Cowlamb. 'I can't remember owt but 'east.' [1]

'I'm sure I don't know what we want.'

'Thou knaws nowt nowadays. What's come ower thee? Here, run and take him it.'

Iphis feverishly awaited her father's departure. He came down at last looking the man

[1] Yeast.

he was, hard-headed, resolute, ready to face all the 'pahson' magistrates in the county. He was as dissatisfied as Towse that three of the cloth should sit and hector to practical men. If it was any comfort to him, Moortown to a man would have polled for their total extinction. How his face shone! He was fresh shaven, his waistcoat displaying whitest of linen, round his neck folds of black silk, but no linen above. Iphis heard what her father said to his wife.

'Now, keep that lass at home; don't let her get off. I mean to break the neck o' so much o' that tattlin'. I s'll ha' to part wi' Towse. That wife of his, it's my opinion, is at the bottom of all this mischief.'

'Now, I don't think that,' remonstrated Mrs. Cowlamb, deferentially.

'Bah, all ya women are alike,' sneered he.

'I can't pretend to ha' my eyes allus on her. She may slip off when I hadn't thinking.

'Keep thy eye on her. I s'll be back at noon.'

A throb of delight coursed through Iphis's veins, a breath of freedom seemed to pass her nostrils. From the pantry window she watched her father descend the hill. She did not wish her mother to perceive her eagerness. She was afraid it had been only too palpable. Iphis soon found her opportunity. It was only two fields across. If she could gain the other side of the hedge she would escape observation. The hedge was low but thick and impenetrable. She ran along, almost on all fours until she had passed the range of the house windows. She was breathless on reaching the garthman's house. Mrs. Towse was already apparelled, if not equipped. Iphis could scarcely refrain from smiling at her quaint, beflowered bonnet. She looked, as Towse was wont to observe ungallantly—

'An owd yow dressed lamb fashion.'

Mrs. Towse was looking rather nervous. She was somewhat agitated. She brightened at sight of Iphis.

'I was wondering,' said Mrs. Towse, quaintly.

'I couldn't git afore,' said Iphis; 'an' I can't stop a minute.'

'Gude sakes!' ejaculated Mrs. Towse at a loss.

'You'll find it inside,' said Iphis, hurriedly handing her the envelope and bounding off without any explanation.

When Farmer Cowlamb reached home it was considerably later than noon, and his humour showed no improvement. Mrs. Cowlamb, as a sop, was ready to declare that Iphis had never left her sight, never left the house.

'Where is she now?' asked he, hoarsely.

'Up the back stairs. The gell and her are whitewashing the apple room.'

'That fool of a blacksmith,' execrated her husband. He thought good, after a moment's reflection, to take his wife into his confidence. 'He fon out where that lad got to, an's hed him browt back. They've been afore the magistrates to-day, an' they laid it on. Four pounds compensation, and summuts like thirty

shillings costs. Blacksmith come whining up to me ; I soon shut his mouth. I teld him I'd been a dele better pleased if he'd been at home finishing my harrows.'

'Why, that money would tek some raising,' suggested Mrs. Cowlamb.

'Oh, he mud ha' addled it time he's been away.'

'Was it paid?'

'Why, yis. Our Mrs. Towse went up, and paid wi' a Treminster note. It ud ha' done him good to gone to Treminster for a month or two. I think that would ha' satisfied Iphis. But I s'll change my shepherd. I s'll look out at Can'lemas. Places like mine don't go a-beggin'.'

The next time Iphis met with Mrs. Towse, Iphis was surprised to find her garrulous friend still despondent. Gratitude was a marked element in Mrs. Towse's character, but she had only half-hearted acknowledgments.

'Why, didn't you know? Why, we're

goin' to leave. It came on Towse that sudden, he niver expected it, and he says to the maister, "Is there owt I done amiss?" and your faither he says, "I no fault to find wi' ye." But that ugly he said it, an' my man says, "You'll gie one a good word?" an' your faither he says, "I'll gie ye a good charackter; but be looking out, I mun do the thing that's fair." Somebody,' continued Mrs. Towse, 'mun ha' gen us a lift. My man was that low-spirited about it. A little place he'd a chanch on; it's suer to be taken now. We could ha' kept a couple o' cows, an' we shouldn't ha' been at one man's beck an' call.'

'I'm suer Sam would lend you some money,' said Iphis, confidently.

'We shouldn't like to ask him,' said Mrs. Towse, diffidently; 'I wish we'd niver left Snailhorn, bud kep on.'

'Well, I'll write to Sam and ask him,' volunteered Iphis; 'where is this little place?'

'It's at Willowby,' returned Mrs. Towse, off-handedly: 'sithee, yon's the house.'

'Oh, it's a nice place,' said Iphis.

'Bud, dear,' said Mrs. Towse, seeing even that drawback in a less gloomier light; 'but the last man cleared his rent within a pound or two wi' pigs. One can keep a few sheep; there's a nice swath close, and an acre or so nice and free that'll grow carrots. I don't like you bothering your brother, though.'

'Oh, Sam will do anything I ask him.'

'I'm suer if I tell Towse he'll be high-go-ly (life). It'll be better for poor owd Eph; it's nobbut plainish since he got back, and he has to make up his time efter he's out of his time. Ye see he'd been lowse come Owd Lady-day, an' now it'll be efter May. Bud, you'll ha' to wait on him. I'm suer he'll pay back.'

'Does he know where the money come fra?'

'He niver axed—I teld him I hed to borrow. He said he'd tek his Bible oath we shouldn't suffer a penny, an' I can put faith i' the lad.'

'Well,' said Iphis, 'don't tell him I let

you have the money. Let him think he has to pay it back, but I shan't take it, Mrs. Towse.'

'Oh—a! Oh—a!' exclaimed Mrs. Towse, in approving depreciation. 'Bud he ought to pay tha back.'

CHAPTER 24.

GENTLE COERCION.

THAT lass 'll ha' to go back to Snailhorn,' said Cowlamb to his wife; 'it weant do for her to be here. We s'll niver git on. I wish she was married out o' hand. Long mun keep dingin' at her. She'll gie way i' time. Let her see we mean to be maister on her.'

'Don't ye think he's raither owd for her?' temporised his wife, quietly.

'Owd?' ejaculated Cowlamb; 'owd? all th' better; he'll sooner leave her in possession.'

'Well, for that matter he will, an' he's a caddy owd man. But there's a strange lot o' jiggin' about wi' the lass, just when she

might be a bit o' good to one if she'd nobbut sattle.'

'Sattle,' ejaculated Cowlamb, 'she'd sattle reight enow, nobbut let her hev her own way—like the rest o' you women. Then after, turn round and fall foul o' one for not stopping her fra making a fool of hersen.'

The Willowby blacksmith in his officiousness had again cornered the farmer, wishing to set himself right in a patron's good graces. Cowlamb in his displeasure now passed the blacksmith when he met him with surly notice, sometimes without even looking at him. Some people wishful to be truculent overshoot the mark, and make bad worse.

Cowlamb had witnessed, or fancied he had witnessed, telegraphic messages in chapel. It was inconvenient accompanying Iphis to Snailhorn, but he felt that he must see her safely there. He could have sent her by train to Haveluck—it was Haveluck market—if only he was certain that Sam would be there.

Iphis received her father's ultimatum un-

moved. She had almost expected it. She felt Snailhorn would be preferable to the surveillance of home, though far from her persecuted lover. She was now assured of Ephraim's constancy. In their many love-trysts, when Ephraim was enjoying his dubious season of prosperity, though declarations of constancy might be the exception, they understood each other as well as if the most fervent professions had been uttered; they had eyes full of ardour and ingenuous trust. True, old Long breathed the air of Snailhorn, but she would never trouble herself more about him. They could not force her to say the one necessary word.

But Iphis was scarcely so firm as she believed herself to be. She felt herself weary fighting against a strong will. She had a very dull impression of her journey. Her father kept on talking, but she answered him always with such a mixture of sullenness, limpness, and misery that Cowlamb himself lost heart as well as patience. They would not

have broken their journey, but as they were passing the quaint old house they caught a glimpse of Mr. Long standing owlishly in his front garden. That worthy was odd enough to look at in all conscience. His long hat was firmly set upon his head over lappets of sealskin. There he stood, like some unnatural product of the garden; he might have been a figure-head from some old vessel. But, recognising Cowlamb, he woke up into life and animation, lifting the stick on which he supported himself, his shrill voice despotic and peremptory—

'Hi! stop!' shouted he.

Cowlamb drew rein.

'Hadn't ye goin' to call?' asked Mr. Long, woundedly.

'I really ain't time, Mr. Long.'

'That's d——d rubbish,' commented Mr. Long, impatiently. 'That scoundrel of a lad o' mine 'll take your hoss out, or stand with it. I want to speak to ye.'

Cowlamb hesitated, and was lost. He

looked at Iphis, then made up his mind. For the moment he forgot his anxiety to be back home again, superintending the dressing of his winter corn and the preparation of the land for it.

'Sam driv past this morning,' said Mr. Long, with a snap of his toothless gums.

'Now, look at that!' exclaimed Cowlamb to himself, mortified; 'if I'd been suer thou could ha' come by train.'

'And browt him home. Ah, Sam's a rum chap when he gits to Haveluck, fond o'—but no tales out o' school,' added he.

'Here, git out wi' thee,' muttered the farmer to his daughter, 'what art tha bogglin' at?' Old Long's speech had excited in her father momentary rage.

Iphis sprang out nimbly, reaching the ground before her father's foot touched the step.

Miss Grinstead glanced at Iphis peculiarly. Iphis thought the poor maiden lady looked as if wishful to escape. Mr. Long had perempt-

orily bidden the farmer to open the door, following in himself last, behind Iphis.

'We're going to have a spell of cold weather, Cowlamb. I shall have to keep indoors, that I shall; but law, I can eat, Cowlamb, I can eat; and when a man can eat, Cowlamb, there isn't so much the matter with him, now is there?'

'It's a good thing heving a appetite,' responded Cowlamb.

'Appetite, that's it. You'll ha' one by this. I'se think we've got bread and cheese i' th' house. Here you, Miss Grinstead —but we got no gell, she's left us. You see she started to have fits, we couldn't do with folks having fits. She got that masterful, I set the dog on her. I says to him—"Siss! Helats!" He flew at her in a minute.'

'Did he bite her?' gasped Iphis.

'No,' replied Mr. Long, quickly, afraid he was creating a bad impression, 'no, but she tumbled in a fit; she'd never had 'em afore.'

'What a shame!' murmured Iphis.

'Why, I never thought he'd flown at her,' said Mr. Long, agitatedly, his lip quivering; 'the d——d hussy wouldn't do as she was bid. I paid her her wages though to a penny. She gave us notice. I told her I wouldn't do it agean, but she wouldn't stop.'

'I should ha' been as frightened,' said Iphis.

'But,' said Mr. Long, gallantly, 'I should never have set the old dog on you. But she was idle as a dog's hairy, as ableless as could be.'

Miss Grinstead was looking volumes at Iphis. But Iphis would not meet Miss Grinstead's eyes intelligently; she felt weary, and Cowlamb himself was beginning to grow impatient.

'What are you shiffling about, Cowlamb? You're like an ill-sitting hen.'

Mr. Long failed to understand such uneasiness. The farmer, with a desire to be gone in his head, failed in artifice.

'My horse'll git cowd standing,' said Cowlamb, excusing himself; 'we've come sharp, and I want to be back home to-night. I've a lot o' things to see to.'

'Very well, very well—but,' pleaded Mr. Long in a whisper, as Cowlamb rose, 'you'll call as you're going back, just for a minute?'

'Can't ye tell us now what it is?'

The old man had a mysterious look forward which Cowlamb was crafty enough to understand, but craftier still to pretend that he didn't. Iphis was now outside the door waiting.

'About that dowter o' yours. What does she say?'

'Say? I'd knaw what she says.'

'No w'ys loth?'

'Ye see,' said Cowlamb, 'she's like all the rest o' young things—skittish. She will an' she weant, she doesn't knaw her own mind, or she's got fancies in her head, this an' t'other. Bud they'll wear out.'

'Aye, a young sprunny?' queried Mr. Long, desperately.

'Bud I hadn't for it,' raged Cowlamb inwardly, outwardly calm. 'When she finds she's well mestered, she'll be glad to hev onybody.'

'Well, I can't afford to wait, ye know. I know nobody cares a button about me. That relation of mine was past t'other day, and never so much as called. He's a clargyman, a nice divil he is to hev relations. My bit o' money isn't worth looking after, I'se think. Proud as Lucifer he is, d—— him.'

'He's a nat'ral fool,' said Cowlamb.

'A d——d idiot,' qualified Mr. Long, bitterly. 'But I'll marry that gell o' yours, and we'll show him a thing or two. Eh, Cowlamb? He! he! he!'

'Don't reckon o' chickens afore they're hatched, Mr. Long,' said Cowlamb, smiling dexterously.

'Oh, Cowlamb, you're a wonderful man—wonderful! Devilish bad to trap you are.

You've as much sense in your little finger as some folks hes in their whole bodies. I've a nephey—I call him nephey——'

But Cowlamb, not wishing for a repetition of Mr. Long's grievances, followed after Iphis, and pulling the rug off the horse gathered up the reins. In a few minutes Iphis was breathing more freely.

They found Sam from home, sure enough. Cowlamb was not long before he began to fidget about him, wondering what time Sam would get home.

'It'll be late,' said Cowlamb, 'bud I wodn't sit up on him. Git off to bed, and don't thou sit moosin' up late. If we'd nobbut got off at five, as I wanted, we should ha' got here afore he started.'

He was not surprised at Iphis leaving him, but sitting alone he began to wax impatient. He felt hurt that she should stay upstairs so long, as if oblivious that he was there. Conflicting sentiments warred within. He felt that he had gone far to

alienate her affection. He felt that he had a right to be master to save her from herself, and see that she did best for herself. He had not forgotten the emotions of his own youth. His own romance occurred to him, making him a little uncomfortable, disposing him to relent a little. But then it was just possible in those early days Farmer Cowlamb could not have withstood temptation, had it come to him in the shape of a moneyed spinster. The sweetheart he would perhaps have thrown over had there been a golden bait.

'Iphis, aren't ye comin' down? Am I to sit here by mysen?' he shouted at last at the foot of the stairs.

He seemed to be unmindful that Sam's men were left to their own devices. He was growing weary of putting himself forward on Sam's farm.

Iphis descended, and was for bustling through into the kitchen. A look from him deterred her.

'I was going to see if any dinner was on the way,' said she.

'Never mind, we'll take pot luck. Sit down a bit. What's the use o' makin' a foist about that?'

He was speaking in a kinder tone. A rebellious suspicion lurked in Iphis's mind, although she was won over a little by it. He took a long clay pipe, and filled it with tobacco out of Sam's pewter box. This was something most unusual for him. On very rare occasions he smoked in the daytime. But tobacco, soothing wearied body and mind, is happy in the inspiration it gives. He smoked on silently, his lips emitting short, sharp puffs, his eyes resting upon her, to be withdrawn when she met his gaze. She felt herself growing uncomfortable under his consideration.

'Now, then, which does t' like best, Snailhorn or Willowby?'

'One place is as good as another when one has plenty to do,' answered she.

'I think thou likes Snailhorn best,' said he, coaxingly. 'I do. I wish we'd niver left. Bud I allus wished to push my lads forrad. I wish thou'd been a lad, Iphis.'

'I wish I had,' said she.

'Why?'

'I'd knaw. Lads can do more as they like.'

'Aye, they do as they like, worse it is for 'em. What good has it done Sam, so much doing as he liked? When he was a young lad, like a young hoss I let him hev his heead, so long as he kept within bounds. I thowt to mysen o' making a man on him, letting him trust to hissen. I nowt to complain of but one thing, and that'll be the death on him maybe. I'd knaw who he teks after. Now, I let him marry who he liked. I thowt he'd her to live wi', and I niver mattered her much.'

'Sam's fit for no decent woman at times,' said Iphis, rebelliously.

'He is good to thou, isn't he?' asked her father, quickly.

'He behaves well to me,' said Iphis, fervently.

'That'll do,' said her father, relieved; 'if I thowt—why I'd yoke out an' take thee back again. I do wish his wife an' him could ha' got on together onyhow. There was Coldgrave's owdest dowter, nobbut two on 'em. I feel suer they'd ha' gone well together. I was all for it, and so was Coldgrave, and she nobbut wanted astin'. Sam's face wasn't such a colour as it is now. Sam always was dutiful. If I'd nobbut ha' said the word, he'd changed and been comfortable now.'

Cowlamb forgot that he had refrained from opposition, because the dowry of Sam's intended was unquestionable. Moreover, with all his penuriousness, he had some admiration for people of a dashing sort, particularly if they were people who counted social uprising three or four generations back.

'Faithers hesn't done with their baens when they're grown up,' continued he. 'They're as anxious then about 'em as when

they were little. I used to think you would all get off my hands when I got owd, an' I should sattle down peaceful like. It ommost knocked me ower, all Sam's trouble. If thou was to marry, Iphis, and be all wrong, I think it would clean put me in my coffin.'

She could see that her father was in earnest.

'I want thou, above all others, to make no mistake. It's time thou was in a comfortable home, an' I don't want to see thee tied to a good-to-nowt, wastin' all his wife's browt to him an' ligging on her friends, tiring 'em out, and thou worrying thysen into thy grave. When ta got a houseful o' baens, an' hed such a creatur' to do with an' prop up, thou'd wish thou'd deed afore ta was married. Thou'd feel thysen bound to stick to him. All women do, if it brings 'em to the parish. How should you like to find yoursen coming to charing for a shilling or eighteenpence a day?'

She just did picture to herself such a

climacteric fate, and was considerably startled thereat. Her father observed her change. 'An' it's worse when there isn't a bit to be had, when folks can do beout ye. An' if a woman goes out charing six days i' th' week, what a dog's life it is!—greasing a woman up not half so good as hersen for fear she should get out o' favour, an' her git somebody else! My poor mother went out charing, I remember; an' faither an' us what meals we hed, an' what a time she hed! She used to ha' to sit up o' nights cleaning her awn house up, an' doing her bit o' weshing an' sich like. I used to tell her when I got big enough she shouldn't go out a weshing no more; but she didn't last——' There was a ring of deep sadness in his voice. 'God rest her. I'm detarmined no good-to-nowt shall hev a penny-piece o' my money, not a penny. It's a hard thing when one's moiled an' made th' best o' things to see it all ended.'

But his charing picture had moved her more than all that he had said before—than

his closing sentences. He had never spoken to her before of his mother that she remembered. He was sore yet thinking of her. Now she had heard him speak of his father, and with not much esteem. He was, no doubt, thriftless or soulless, perhaps an ailing man.

'You've a chanch to look behind nobody,' continued Cowlamb; 'hev a pony carriage, a good home—such a home,' added he rapturously, 'as a real lady would be glad on, an' all going a-begging, it caps owt; an' not be bothered wi' th' owd chap long; he can't last more'n a year or two; I can't see him lasting three, nowt o' th' sort.'

'He's such a bad owd man,' said Iphis, with her eyes down, 'an' hes been.'

'What?' cried her father, amazed. 'How do *you* know what he is, an' what he hes been?'

'I've heerd all sorts o' things about him.'

'Tales are lies. All tales I hear I set down as lies, and big lies. His worst point is

swearing, an' that he mud be got off. The thief repented at the last hour——'

'He set th' dog o' that poor lass——'

'Didn't he say he was sorry he did? he'd no idee the owd dog 'ud be so mad.'

Her father defended Mr. Long with feverish emphasis. 'An' she was a bad hussy,' he added.

She was not wholly gained over, but her hesitation grounded her father's hopes high. He did not press her unduly. Another conversation artfully leading up to this project would convince Iphis that she would want crowning for a simpleton if she should suffer such good fortune to escape her.

Her dream had faded from her mind.

'I s'll be forced to hev him,' said she, bitterly.

He had only to kick the last prop away, he thought, triumphantly.

'Nay. If thou calls it forced, persuading thee to be better off than ony on us. Why, thou'd ha' more money than Sam an' me put

together, an' no maister ower thee. Thou could hev a new frock every day, an' not feel thy pocket-bottom. Let's ha' some dinner. I wonder what Sam had yesterday?'

Her father effusively took his leave an hour later. He was, indeed, anxious to confer with his fellow-conspirator.

'She'll be all right. She's coming to. I knew she would,' remarked Cowlamb, gleefully to Mr. Long. He sat in his trap, Mr. Long at the garden-gate.

'No 'pulsion, no 'pulsion?' queried old Long, agitated with his luck.

'No, not there; she begins to see it's more comfortable marrying where her friends ha' had the forethought o' the lookout afore her.'

'Heigh, heigh, to be suer.'

'Bud,' said the farmer, 'better let her bide a bit. I s'll be ower agean next week, so I'll be saying good-day, Mr. Long. I've a long stretch afore me. Clk, clk!'

Iphis stood at the window and beheld her

father drive off. She stood there until he was well out of sight. She fell into a reverie. She must marry old Long. One, two, three years, then she would be free again. Her last three years had gone quickly. It seemed no time much to look backward. Very likely Ephraim was not in a mood to settle just yet. He had never spoken of marriage to her. But he had been persecuted. Then her mind resolved to love one man only and none other. Still, a presentiment of Ephraim's possible future unworthiness disturbed her confidence. He was careless and somewhat unstable; though perhaps he was not mercenary, and would not desert her if even she acquainted him of her father's determination to disinherit her if she ran counter to his wishes. Iphis was very sore about that poverty; want was so far off her now, and Sam was less penurious even than they were at Willowby. She loved the consciousness of plenty, and if her father turned his back upon her all must depend upon the husband. If

only Sam were at home she would be less a victim to her thoughts. Her solitude seemed to encourage irresolution, sickening indecision. Tea time came ; she had spent the afternoon at the window, or wandering aimlessly over the house. The table was set, but she had no appetite, drinking a solitary cup of tea and eating nothing. She began to be feverish in her wish for Sam to be at home. If he only knew that she was there! Would he be late? Would he get home that night? Sam, she knew, was put out because her father had removed her away from Snailhorn. She would not ask the girl for an account of Sam's conduct in her absence. She was too proud to do so. A look or a word wanting in respect to the master always met with her strong disapproval. She would not have Sam criticised by any one on the farm. She went to the bureau, and examined the spirit bottles. They had been refilled, she concluded. Perhaps he had gone that day to look out for a housekeeper. He could not get on with a

drab of a kitchen girl and a labourer's wife coming in to render assistance. Then her mind dwelt again on the ideal charwoman of her father's picturing; if she came to that would she be suspected and of but little consideration? If Sam only came home that night!

She sat up late waiting, regardless of her father's injunction. It was a weary vigil, listening to the clock's monotonous tick, knowing that she alone was up in this great old house. The sighing of the wind outside, trees restless, the silence of the night did not oppress her so much as it disturbed her. She at last could not keep her eyes open; then she dozed, losing consciousness; waking with a start, the brilliant light of the lamp affrighted her. Then when her eyes became accustomed to it, its steady soft light seemed as if it were the beacon of an eternity.

The fire had gone out. She shivered at the cold, at the lugubrious and unsettled state of her mind. She took off globe and glass,

holding the wick of a candle over the flame; then she extinguished the lamp with a sudden effort. The candle sputtered as she hurried up the staircase. She threw her clothes right and left in a half sleep, and blowing out her candle, sprang into bed, feeling her loneliness almost insupportable. In sleep as in death she would forget.

CHAPTER 25.

A RESOLVE.

But they were weary days that followed. In Iphis's mind the state of affairs was almost too dreadful to contemplate. How could a master expect his affairs to flourish when he left everything to chance? Would Sam be at Haveluck? And the mare, how was she faring? Iphis was nearly as anxious about the animal as the man.

'Things 'll go to rack,' she said to herself, with not a little of her father's old-world way of thinking. 'I'm suer the men on a farm want looking after, let 'em be iver so good.'

She one morning woke, and the sun not risen she looked out anxiously towards the quarter where the wind lay. The clouds lay

in long lines, giving her some assurance of settled weather. Silence was in the new light; the earth had not awakened from its drowsiness, but then it was not the time of the year when the melodious notes of our feathered friends assert their early rising, greeting the joyful light of day. She listened, then she heard the sparrows perched along the spout chirruping timidly, their bills tapping right and left; raising her window, all took flight to the apple-trees, there to inquire into the cause of their temporary fright. They were innocent country birds, with scarcely the craft and assurance of the town sparrow, so difficult to beguile or deceive.

The foreman was in the kitchen inquiring if the master had come home or got down.

'I know what to do,' said he to Iphis; 'bud I'd like th' maister to hev his say. There hesn't been a frost yit to bear a duck on a dyke, but who can tell when it will come?'

'He will be home to-day,' said Iphis, confidently.

The farm foreman was relieved with this assurance. He received it as certain knowledge. He could not suspect what firm conviction and resolve was causing Iphis to speak with such decision.

'Law, what a fellow 'tis!' muttered the farming man outside the house. 'I git a outening once a year; it'll soon be once a week wi' him, I think.'

When Iphis's eyes had opened to the dusky light of morning, it almost seemed to her that she had slumbered with an inspiration, and slept herself into prosaic determination. She would go herself and fetch Sam home. She would walk to Haveluck. No one in the house should know her plan. After an early dinner she would go out, ostensibly to see a neighbour; it would be as if Sam, returning from the town, had picked her up. But the farm servants were not such artless beings as Iphis supposed

them to be. In her simplicity she believed that they were in the darkest ignorance of Sam's proclivities. But then it was not a tithe of Sam's debaucheries that she knew herself or dreamed of. With what spirit she started upon her self-imposed task!—the skirts of her dress tucked up, she boldly confronted the long walk she had before her.

Haveluck was a town of modern development, of great antiquity, according to local histories, but, until late decades, of sparse population. But the last fifty years it had increased more than any other town in the county, had become a recognised port, had thrown out feelers over suburban villages, making one of them its watering-place. But the town had no attractiveness, no picturesqueness. Timber and raft yards faced unpretentious shops, the streets had never been planned with any attempt at precision, much less effect. A noble building here and there was lost, or its effect destroyed by incongruities. There was a briny aroma in the town

and a foreign flavour, a sensation of vulgarity, and an impression of suddenly-acquired opulence and arrogance. There was a theatre, patronised chiefly by the fisher folk, furnishing dramatic excitement of the most pronounced kind. A music hall, which any refined person would have abominated. A Mayor and Corporation, exhibiting in their persons much of the *nouveaux riches*, and in their speech much coarseness of mind and virulence of temper; their schemes for the town's advancement partaking strongly of jobbery. There was continual war and strife, and always at elections, it was tacitly understood, sufficient practices to unseat the whole of the House of Commons. And here Samuel Cowlamb elected to enjoy himself.

Truly, there was something to see of interest morning by morning, if it was only the smacks coming in, the commotion of unlading, the wondrous amount of silvery fish, the astonishing heaps and competition at auction. There was something refreshing, too, in the

scent of the foreign wood, the hemp as it was craned into warehouses, the linseed, and the tar, and the imports that carried one's mind not only to Norwegian ice-floes, Northern forests, Russian plains and barbarism, but to gentler climes where the citron grows, and to lands scorched with a fierce and fiery sun.

Iphis was weary enough when the town lay before her, the sea glistening beyond, the water cold as a serpent and as treacherous, so it seemed to strike her as her eyes rested upon it. A little out of Snailhorn, on higher ground, she could see the sea, the smoke from the steamers, the sails of the shipping in the roads, and the huge hydraulic tower ; but nothing could be seen of the town until one was close upon it. Here the sea was encroaching year by year ; towns had been swept away, according to tradition ; but the land washed away was deposited on the lip of the estuary.

The usual riff-raff of the town stood in

gossiping groups, those who were too idle to make their way down to dock or shore. In the irregular-shaped market place they soothed their stomachs over iron rails, their eyes fixed intently on granite cubes, talking gravely as to a gossip in a well. Some of them looked up when Iphis approached, and she furnished a new twist to their colloquies. How quiet everything seemed! she was accustomed to the busy market day. This was the old part of the town, with the old-world inns, still retaining the sanded floor, always quiet off the market day.

What will not a woman do for a man when she loves him or is tied to him by bonds of blood? Leaving the lover who is so far progressed as to feel himself comparatively sure and certain, do any brothers take fully into consideration the attachment of their sisters, the interest that all their ambitions and projects excite? But are not brothers gainers from contact and association, more guarded in speech and habit, less

prone to coarseness, more refined in their approach towards women? A good brother, no less than a good son, is likely to make the better husband; and a brother who makes a sorry husband would have been worse had he not had a sister. Sam Cowlamb believed that he deserved, or nearly so, all that he got, at the same time making doleful complaint. He had expected every woman to be of the pattern of Iphis; he now wondered at his delusion. If his wife had been, of course things would have gone on more smoothly. He saw now that he had been greatly in the wrong; but he was of a proud, 'stunt' spirit, disdaining to cry *peccavi* to her.

Iphis entered the inn-yard where Sam put up, and where her father used to put up. The ostler opened a stable-door, and Sam's mare lifted her head, munching out of the crib, scattering oats, nodding her head up and down as if recognising Iphis, but quite content with her quarters.

Do you know where he is ?' asked Iphis, timorously.

'No, 'm ; he might loose hissen ower an' ower agean i' Haveluck, an' them that wanted him niver find him. His hoss has been well done to ; I seed to that. Oh, he'll turn up ; I knawn him tek off to Treminster an' stop a day or two.'

'If I give you a shilling can you find him if he is in the town ?'

'I'll try,' said the ostler.

The landlady of the inn, hearing the discussion, showed herself, recognising Iphis.

'Why, it's Miss Cowlamb. Come into the house, Miss Cowlamb. You are lagged up—you've walked ?'

'Yes,' said Iphis, wearily.

'Come in. You can sit in my private room and take your boots off.'

'Yes,' said Iphis, assenting gratefully ; 'the roads clicked up so. Maybe you'll let somebody clean my boots ?'

Iphis drank a glass of wine, and her

weariness seemed almost to have gone when her boots were off her feet. This was followed by drowsiness and a feeling akin to misery.

'They an't worth it,' declared the landlady, emphatically, regarding Iphis compassionately. 'No, I'm suer they an't.'

Iphis conjectured that she was alluding to the men.

'I've been home—to Willowby,' excused Iphis. 'Sam didn't knaw I was to get back so soon. But we do want him at home now. You see 'm it'll maybe come bad weather.'

'To be suer, to be suer. But it is too bad—I shall have some tea ready soon; lie down on the sofa and rest—now do, Miss Cowlamb. Don't be frightened, nobody ever comes in here—let me catch 'em. My husband's at Pardney Foal Fair.'

Iphis had often heard her father speak of Pardney Fair.

'I wonder if Sam's there!'

'There's no telling, baen. When once

they gits off, the best thing allus is to make your mind easy. Now, you'll be quite comfortable. I shan't be long. If you're the least bit alarmed you can push back this catch when I'm gone out, and I'll knock, eh ?'

'Oh, I'm not alarmed,' said Iphis, with a faint smile.

CHAPTER 26.

PERIL.

The fragrance of the tea was grateful to Iphis, weary as she was. The landlady brought in the tray herself, and Iphis knew that it was out of compliment to her, and to humour her. Iphis had not said it, but she dreaded strange eyes now.

'Law, Miss Cowlamb, I've been used to your father coming here for a vast o' years, an' you coming to-day, doesn't your face put me in mind of him ivery minute!'

Iphis heard a familiar step. Her ears were acute. It was a well-known foot. 'Why, that's Sam!' exclaimed she, excitedly.

'Mr. Cow—lamb!' cried the landlady. Sam was turning in at the bar; he looked round. 'Miss Cowlamb is here!' cried the landlady, satisfied that she had caught his ear. Sam put his head in at the door, endeavouring to look at his ease and at his best.

'H'lo!' ejaculated he, pleasure in his face. Iphis felt a chill at her heart; his eyes were bloodshot, his hand hot and feverish, and his face—what a colour it had!

'Miss Cowlamb will drink a cup of tea with me, then she will be ready. Will you drink a cup, Mr. Cowlamb?—you're welcome.'

'No; I'll turn in and have a glass while she's ready.'

Iphis hurriedly drank her tea, to don hat and jacket. In the meantime, a caller or two dropping in, Sam was loth to go. She wished that she had got up the moment Sam showed himself; he did seem in a humour for going then.

'Oh,' said Sam, his mood easy, 'what's

thy hurry ? We s'll get home afore we go to bed, baen. The mare's fresh, and we s'll be home in a quicksticks.'

The good soul of a landlady was anxious to soothe Iphis.

'Come and sit a bit, he'll be ready i' now.'

Iphis followed her compassionate friend, but her temper was rising. She sat down, but bolt upright, her eye fierce. She was as restless as a bird. Whenever the landlady left her, Iphis was upon her feet, presenting herself at the bar door—'Now, Sam, an't you ready ?'

This occurred at least a dozen times, her voice in turn impatient, coaxing, plaintive, despairing. At last she became desperate.

'I've ordered the mare out,' cried she, 'so if you don't come I shall set off without you.'

'I'm a coming,' returned Sam, coaxingly. 'I'm a coming. That I ha' to be ordered

about by a lass'—this was a little pleasantry for his friends.

Sam had some difficulty in rising. His friends had for him admonitory injunctions, but it is astonishing how such men escape casualties. The table was a firm friend to him, the door frame, the walls of the narrow passage. With a little assistance he managed to scramble into the trap, and Iphis got in after him.

'Which way?' asked she a little anxiously, for Sam was turning the mare's head round.

'Sands.'

'Sands! How's the watter?

'Tide's low. You'll ha' time; your mare spanks along,' said a bystander.

Haveluck boasted a famous shore. When the water was low, a clear mile and a half of the journey was saved. But Iphis was always timorous. When the tide was coming in it had a habit of creeping round a knuckle

of the coast, leaving an island of sand high and dry for some half hour, but any one caught there ran risk of a dreary fate.

'The tide *is* coming up,' exclaimed Iphis, as she looked out towards the sea, of a dull, muddy hue, the line of water scarcely discernible from the murky sky, rendered still more uncertain by forecast of rain and the gloom of impending darkness. 'Let's turn back, Sam, and go round.'

'Pooh!' exclaimed he, contemptuously, 'we s'll ha' rucks o' time, I tell ye.'

A fleet of smacks were coming in, their red sails spread to the gusty breeze. Squally weather was evidently anticipated. Iphis's mind was susceptible. The atmosphere was tinged with melancholy. The water could be heard rolling up with angry sob, as if only seeking some excuse and outlet for pent-up discontent. It licked the sand, rolled over as if disappointed, renewing its efforts—apparently receding, but still gaining ground. A tug, a small affair, was steaming out to

succour some belated vessel rolling dismally in the trough.

'My word,' said she, still more anxiously, 'it will be dark directly and rain——.' She took it upon herself to incite the mare to greater speed. She was nervous to a degree. She noticed the wind blew sharply off the water. Once past that treacherous cove where the deceitful waves stole round to surprise and entrap, she would feel comfortable and assured.

Her eye scanning the sand, she could see channels filling, glistening like white veins.

'Sam, do you see how it's coming up?' But Sam did not answer her, he made no attempt to pacify her; but she did not pay much attention to this, she knew why he did not reply. He was in such a mood at times. She felt herself at the mercy of a log, her voice only for her own ear, her anxiety without a tranquillising condition. The reins were hanging loose in Sam's fingers—she became painfully conscious that Sam was becoming less and less capable to

meet danger if there was any danger to meet. At last he lurched heavily upon her. Her disgust and her helpless impatience were too deep for words. Besides, her mind was too busily engaged revolving the chance of their safe deliverance. Above them rose to no great height a natural bank, considerably undermined. Sometimes great masses of soil fell, to be carried away in the capacious maw of the ever-encroaching sea. Evidences of its persistent inroad lay about them at every step, huge stones barely out of the way, masses of earth with the vegetation still verdant and flourishing. But the mare seemed to know her way; sagaciously she avoided obstacles, briskly covering the firm sand. She was accustomed to an inert whip. But Iphis's anxiety increased momentarily; before her eyes, in the dusky light, gleamed nothing but water, greeting her ears with a low chuckling throb. Before rounding the corner she turned to look behind her—she had an impulse to snatch the reins, turn the

mare, and retrace their way. Her heart almost leaped into her mouth—the water was like a silver line reaching to a point they had passed. They were cut off behind; how would it be with them forward? She listened, her acuteness of hearing tense with her sense of danger; she could hear a stealthy wash on the gravel ahead. In the gathering gloom it was not easy to define the advance it was making. She took the reins from Sam's limp fingers and shook them desperately on the mare's back, unable to reach the whip. Surely the wheels of the trap passed through water left by a bolder wavelet. She could tell at last that one wheel ran in sea-water. Not many yards further on the mare's feet went splash, splash, and Iphis's ears had nothing in them any longer but the solitary sob of the sea.

'Sam!' she cried, piteously, 'wake up. The tide's up, we shall be drownded,' she moaned to herself. 'Reach me the whip then,' she cried, despairingly.

For the mare with the water up to her fetlocks slackened, snorted, and showed a disposition to stop, timorously shaking her head suddenly as her feet splashed water into her nostrils.

'If she begins to jib!' Iphis thought, 'we are lost. Get on, mare,' she cried, hysterically. 'Lend me the whip, Sam, do you hear? Oh, you drunken beast!'

She reached beyond him, and her body, some slight support to him heretofore, taken away, he lurched heavily across the trap. It required all her strength to bring him upright. She could not remember ever to have seen him so bad as this; not even when he lay helpless in the room at Snailhorn did he seem such an inanimate log as now. She had no idea how much further they had to go. Darkness gathered apace, the bank still loomed above. Once or twice she had left Haveluck, taking this short cut; but it had been broad daylight. She knew the high road was gained over loose shingles, the sea washing into level

country. The mare was trotting knee-deep, the water splashing into Iphis's lap at times. If it got no worse than this—but the horse sank deeper and deeper, and Iphis in terror wondered if loose shifting sands reached so near the shore. She remembered to have heard of incautious bathers losing their lives in close proximity to the beach. If Sam would only wake up ! The mare stopped in her shambling trot, sobbing as the water reached her body. Iphis knew by this that the water must be over the axle; she could hear it breaking its strength on the bank opposite, and swirling in its repulse between the spokes of the wheels, almost carrying the mare off her feet. Only a moment and Iphis endured an agony, the mare was surely swimming, the trap floating. She called wildly upon Sam, shook him, but the heavy figure lurched so violently from her he would have fallen out had she not relinquished the reins and caught him round the body, imperilling her own safety. A chill coursed through her veins,

his response was scarcely the elasticity of a vital frame, if prostrate and unconscious.

'Sam,' she cried again, 'wake up, wake up! We shall be carried out. The mare is swimming now!'

But her brother did not answer her, and it required all her strength to keep him upright. She touched his face, it was cold and moist with the damps of death. She placed her hand where she imagined she would ascertain if his heart was still beating, but she could detect no pulsation. Then she commenced weeping. What was she to do? What could she do? Must she silently wait for the end? What effort could she make? In time the mare's strength must be spent, or it would, with the instinct of self-preservation, endeavour to free itself, and so overturn the trap or fill it with water in its frantic struggles.

Iphis remembered once to have seen a body found in the water. It was towed to shore, a stake driven in the bank, and the

corpse secured to it. It was considered unlawful to remove it until the coroner had seen it. He and the jurymen, it was said, waded knee deep to view the body. It was a suicide—a servant girl deserted by her lover. She lay in the water the whole of one Sunday, face downwards, her boot-heels floating like corks. Iphis could not free herself of the incubus of the spectacle for years. It recurred to her again. In her excitement she fancied that she could see them now rising and falling on the surface, the water bubbling and dancing gleefully around them. Look which way she would, they were there. She reasoned with herself that the affair occurred in the river near to Snailhorn, not here in the sea, but it did not serve to dispel the illusion. She closed her eyes ; opening them again she saw nothing but a waste of water, then her old terror reasserted itself.

Ah! what a waste of water. She pictured herself tied to a stake, Sam lost and not recovered, the *débris* of the cart floating away

or sunk in deep water. But then some Haveluck people would know something of the incidents leading up to the catastrophe. Would that man ever sleep again, who by encouraging Sam in his obstinacy had sacrificed her life? She thought of her father; he would reproach himself to his dying day, regret his obduracy. How full her mind was! In its disorder and in her terror she could readily believe that she had been floating there half the night. But it was of few moments' duration; the mare regained her feet, scrambling in her first instinct of firm foothold, walking wearily, cowed and frightened but still under control. With one hand Iphis steadied Sam, groping for the reins with the other, speaking encouragingly to the mare. She found them at last, caught in the dashboard iron, and she breathed freer again. She had to learn afterwards how narrowly she had escaped with her life. Five minutes later the mare in ten or twelve feet of water could scarcely have recovered itself. The bank

looming no longer above, the mare even seemed to be aware that but a few yards further on the shingly road dipped to the beach. What a pressure was removed from Iphis's mind, hearing no longer the mare struggling, the wheels grinding on gravel! But this horrible dead weight upon her and the necessity that she must sustain it! It was almost as unnerving, more horrible. She felt the horror of it, for her nerves were still unstrung, but she felt too tense to faint. Escaping from imminent death, her brain seemed now on fire with suppressed hysteria, her heart standing still with terror. She had but one thought, that of getting home ; she endeavoured to urge the animal on faster ; but to her it seemed that her lips faintly essayed a sound. She knew that the mare was recovering herself, nearing home the animal's instinct and attachment stimulating it. But Iphis was impatient in her excitement. She felt herself part of a machine making so many evolutions, not to be quickened though

it were a matter of life and death. A night's ride for her to remember, a night terrible in constant dread and need of self-reliance. Sam was less dangerous now than when she had seen him once or twice mad in delirium. Sam had been good to her living, why should she fear him dead? Her mind was a catechism of terror, and reasoning against terror. A young girl, perhaps a little superstitious, it was for her a weird trial ; it was something that she was able to maintain the poise and balance of her mind. It would have been death, perhaps, had she given way to the faint-hearted feeling that first possessed her when the terrible conviction reached her of peril. She had been near upon despair, her energy was the outcome of despair, her firmness was unnatural. She owed her life to her tenacity, sustaining the heavy unwieldy body of her brother ; he had been ballast in the light trap. For some moments after her greater peril was past, she supported him as if unconscious that life was extinct.

Her faculties returned to her on reaching the labourers' cottages. She cried wildly for assistance, for some one to go with her through the gate. It seemed an age to her before any one answered, but everything this night seemed to have an eternity of duration. A man came out hurriedly, opening the gate. The other confined labourer was roused, and he was up at the house a few minutes later.

'Some one must go for a doctor,' wailed Iphis, hysterically. 'He's dead—Sam's dead. We nearly been drownded—you can't wake him. I've driven him all the way, and he's been like this.'

'There's no need for doctor, I'm thinking, poor fellow!' said one labourer with some feeling.

Sam had been liked by those in his service. He was no churl.

'Never mind, send for one,' cried she in hysterical temper. 'He may have some life in him—they may bring him round. What can I do?'

She was conscious that she was talking wildly, her mind unhinged. She was certain of it herself that Sam was indeed past all succour. She hurried into the house, leaving the men to get Sam in. But when she saw him brought in, so irresponsive to their efforts, his heels trailing on the stones, the utter helplessness of his body, the dull weight between them, the horrible flaccidity of his features, it seemed to her a sight so terrible she shrieked again and again, falling heavily across their path, insensibility relieving her much enduring nerves of further strain upon them.

Was it a dream, hearing words uttered compassionately in a calm, steady voice—the voice of some one apparently accustomed to emergencies, sick chambers ?

'Send for her parents—her mother. She must have a sedative. It will be a great wonder if she escapes fever. Hush, she is coming round. My dear, swallow this if you can ; it will do you good.'

CHAPTER 27.

PLOUGH-JAGS.

We can do an amount of thinking when we lie sleepless in bed. During the time that Iphis lay ill, the epitaph in Snailhorn churchyard occurred to her again and again. She had it by heart, and thought it over incredulously. She became almost peevish thinking so much about it. Such virtue was a slur on people prone to rebelliousness. If Mrs. Susannah Horsnayle had been a dutiful daughter it was because she had never been opposed in her sweethearting; if she had become an affectionate wife it was because she had married the man of her choice; or never having seen a man to set her heart upon, she took the first brought forward without pre-

judice. Iphis pictured the lady in her declining years—a stiff old dame standing much upon her dignity, a dark-grey eye and strongly marked features and a complexion of parchment. A martinet among servants, and one not given to the exhibition of tenderness or softness towards her descendants.

Iphis was so low at times that she believed that she would die and follow Sam. As yet no one would speak of him; her mother would not open her lips, and Iphis dare not question her father. He had aged terribly. The old, relentless eyes were still keen, but the crow's feet about them were deeper and more in number. She had had a share in augmenting them; some people would say so, she knew, when she was dead. They would put no inscription on her headstone unless it was to intimate that she had been a rebellious daughter.

> Whatever faults in me you see do you take care to shun,
> And mention none, but look at home—there's something to be done.

She was removed to Willowby in a close

fly, and even at Christmas she could only come down stairs and sit near the fire, propped with pillows and wrapped about with shawls.

'When the fine weather comes, if thou gits no better,' said her father, 'thou shalt go to Queenberry Well.'

He had more faith in its healing than in doctors. There was as much faith in the healing waters of Queenberry Well as in that pool of Bethesda, and the hedges around were hung with rags, the votive offerings of those who had come there to leave sores and ills behind them. It was absolutely necessary that they should leave some portion of their clothing behind or they could never hope for restoration.

Iphis had heard her father say it before, and she hoped that there would be no one else there on the same errand. She had some repugnance to playing the part of a nymph or naïad. But oh, how tired she was of inaction, sitting there from day to day! She had nothing to do but sit and think;

walking about the kitchen floor upset her. So much thinking was not good for her. Ephraim Sparrow came too much into it, making her despondent and miserable. She had not a chance to hear of him, good or bad. She was a prisoner, and her illness precluded her from concocting any plan of sending message or word-of-mouth encouragement.

'The plough-jags are out,' said the farmer. 'I wonder if they'll retch us.'

He sat after tea opposite her, his slippered feet on the fender. He had given up his side of the fireplace for the invalid, and usurped his wife's. He thought it would stir up in Iphis some expectancy and interest. Her face was mournful and full of weariness, and her dejection preyed upon his mind. But she did not show much enthusiasm.

The lamp was lit, the same old dreary repetition of evening followed—the monotonous tick of the clock, the as monotonous click of her mother's knitting or her needle, and the protracted yawns of her father, which were

catching. Occasionally her father bestowed a glance upon his wife, or furtively looked across at Iphis.

Outside more snow had fallen. It was a moonless night, and looking out of doors one was constrained indeed to be thankful, that one's lot was not with the houseless. It was a matter for congratulation having not the slightest occasion to go over the threshold. Out in the lane there were voices, the servant girl intimated as much. She was a little timid, and judged that her superiors would see with her the impropriety and irregularity of such a thing as callers on such a night.

The girl listened again, gently opening the scullery window ; voices were clear and tremulous owing to the atmosphere. Hearing her master's previous remark, it was just possible that she suspected the mission of those whose voices preceded them. She was burning to witness what she suspected, but alarmed at the contingency. I think some of us would have a similar feeling if we had to

go into action. It was indeed an amazing spectacle. One might have imagined oneself beholding a few stragglers from an army of a past and more picturesque age—camp followers dressed out in stolen nondescript finery. The party advanced irregularly, proceeding in file as well as they could, if it was for nothing else but easy marching in a beaten track. The leader sported a chocolate cocked hat, plumed with goose feathers, and his jacket was indeed no less gorgeous than wonderful to behold, but it almost gave the impression of the wearer being an animal rather than a man. By his side stalked a smart fellow sporting a militia uniform. Behind them followed others attired more or less grotesquely. There was a guy wearing a low white hat and drab smock, a burlesque of a doctor, a lady revealing fustian trousers, her gown gathered up to avoid the snow. Another travestie of a woman, carrying a doll which was supposed to represent a baby. St. George, a young fellow in his ordinary clothes, making believe

as well as he could, but carrying a wooden sword. Behind them the tag-rag of Willowby, who followed the party in their round. The mummers were somewhat arrogant and pretentious, receiving with some condescension the adulation and homage of the party in their wake.

Reaching Cowlamb's gate there was some parley. It was to insist that the rabble should stay out in the lane. The language was forcible, the retort equally uncourteous, the remonstrance ineffectual; for on reaching Cowlamb's door, the leader, turning round, beheld the whole party behind him. He had a few smothered imprecations, for the door opened, to be abruptly closed in his face by the affrighted servant girl. It was, indeed, an alarming parade. There was a multitude of faces, some of them so daubed up with colour as to appear fiendishly distorted. Boldness is a virtue among mummers. The leader opened the door quickly upon the retreating girl, and

they followed her in as she heralded their approach in apprehensive accents—

'Missis, the plough-jags! The plough-jags!'

Formerly some roughness was only too common among the party who constituted the cast. Their disguise gave them a carnival license. The tradition of their lawlessness still held.

'Let 'em come in,' shouted Cowlamb, with astonishing urbanity, as if relenting. He rose and saw the posse behind the mummers, and his voice changed. 'Now then; out ya go. We can't ha' this door oppen to suit ye. We've badly folks i' th' house.'

It had its effect; but some few stealthily screened themselves behind the company; waxing more confident, they advanced boldly into the large kitchen, one or two audaciously occupying vacant chairs which were placed conveniently near the point of exit.

Iphis sat upright, a little excited with the

advent of such a party. The man in the cocked hat had his face ochred and grimed; his dress was a mass of short coloured ribbons, of all the colours of the rainbow, but crimson and blue predominating. He raised his hat to her with the courtesy of a Lord High Admiral, and after some badinage with Cowlamb, cleared his throat and began the epilogue with an astonishing amount of assurance and condescension :—

Good evening, kind ladies and gentlemen all,
It's a merry time this Christmas, makes me so bold to call.

'I hope you will not be offended at what I've got to say in a short time. There be some lads and lasses this way :—'

Some can dance, and some can sing,
By your consent they shall come in.
Hooker, spoker, sprance, and sprain (Hocus, pocus, France, and Spain),
Here comes the noble sergeant of the same.

'Thou'rt the fool then?' interrupted Cowlamb.

A glance of the eye assented. The inter-

ruption was regarded as inopportune. Meanwhile the Sergeant marched forward, in stately fashion, delivering himself *tête-à-tête* with the Fool :—

In comes the noble sergeant, arrived here just now.
My orders is to 'list all men that follow horse, cart, or plough,
Likewise tinker, tailor, pedlar, nailer,
All other fools that likes to advance—
The more I hears the fiddle play the better I can dance.

FOOL. If thou begins either to dance, sing, or say, I shall very soon march away.

Sergeant sings, a concertina striking up somewhere behind him :—

Kind people give attention, and listen to my song,
I'll tell you of a young man, the time before it's long ;
He's almost broken-hearted, the truth I will declare,
Since love has enticed him, and drawn him in a snare.

(The youth with the wooden sword advances, carrying it before him somewhat shamefacedly).

In comes I, Saint George, with courage stout and bold ;
With my broad sword I won ten thousand pounds in gold ;
I fought with the fiery dragon, and brought him to his slaughter ;
By these few means I gained the King's eldest daughter.

I hacked him, I smashed him as small as flies,
And sent him over to Jamaica to make mince pies.
SERGEANT. Thou hacked him and smashed him as small as flies,
And sent him over to Jamaica to make mince pies?
Pray thee, man, hold thy lies, or thou wilt raise my blood;
If thou be the King I dare face thee.
ST. GEORGE. No king am I that's plain to see,
But with my broadsword I dare face thee.
LADY (advancing sings)—
In comes the lady bright and gay,
Good fortune and good charms;
How scornfully I was thrown away
Into that young man's arms!

Iphis, hitherto regarding all with some contempt and a curled lip, started. The voice struck a chord in her heart. She looked across at her father, who was regarding the fool's play with a broad smile. It was ridiculous nonsense, the farmer was thinking, grown men making themselves a laughing-stock for a few shillings at Christmas time; still it was an old custom, and it amused him a little. Iphis saw that her father was not startled with the voice. She watched the lady, but the dark veil which the individual was chary of raising quite precluded

identification. The Fool was taking her hand gallantly.

Not at all, madam; by the ring on your hand and the tear
in your eye,
Pray tell to me the reason it's for why.
LADY (sings). Kind sir, if I was to tell you the reason it's
for why,
It's all for that young man that makes me sob and sigh;
He swears if I don't marry him, as you shall understand,
He will 'list all for a soldier into some foreign land.
SERGEANT (sings). Come all you lads that's a mind for
'listing, 'list, and do not be afraid,
You shall have all kinds of liquor, likewise kiss the pretty
maid;
Ten bright guineas shall be your bounty if along with me
you go,
Your hat with ribbons shall be trimmed, likewise cut a
gallant show.
ST. GEORGE. Now, kind sir, I take your offer; time will
sweetly pass:
Dash me if I grieve any longer for a proud and saucy lass.
(Affects to take shilling.)
LADY (sings). It's true my love has 'listed and gone to
volunteer,
I never mean to sigh for him, nor for him shed one tear;
I never mean to wed with him, I'll have him for to know—
I'll have another sweetheart and along with him I'll go.
FOOL. You shall have a waiting-maid to wait at your
command,
If you'll consent to wed with me, we'll be married off at
hand.

LADY (lackadaisically). My thoughts was of having a farmer's son.

Iphis laughed. There was some irony in the voice, some meaning intended for her, she knew. Her father felt himself rewarded with that laugh. It was healthy and honest, but he imagined she was amused with the Fool's chagrin.

FOOL. If them be your thoughts, madam, I have done; you may take all your farmer's sons and wed with all your heart. Although my name is Roger, I can follow horse, cart, or plough. I need not tarry long before I get a wife. There's old buxom Jones; she is very well known; she loves me as her life.

LAME JANE (humpbacked and walking with crutch-stick). Dost thou mean me, my dear?

FOOL (pushing her aside). Ask my white leg.

LADY. What makes you speak so much of buxom Jones? Can't I please thee as well? While she is not worth one penny, and I have got buxom Nell to be sung, oh. I have got forty shillings, love, and that's a glorious thing; if you will consent to wed with me unto you I will them bring.

FOOL. Oh, if you've got forty shillings, I have got fifty more, so that and thou will buy an old cow. So we will shake hands in wedlock bands, singing,—Wo, sweet Nelly and I.

LAME JANE. In comes old lame Jane, dabbling over the meadow;
Once I was a blooming young maid, but now I'm a down old widow.
Long have I sought thee, but now I have caught thee.

Since thou called me a bad un, Tommy,
Pray thee, take thy bastard.

FOOL. Bastard, Janey, it's not a bit like me; what is it, male or female?

LAME JANE. It's a male.

FOOL. Why, mine are all females. I am a valiant man just returned from sea. You never saw me in your life before, did you?

LAME JANE. Not as I know on; but look at its eyes, mouth, nose, and chin. It's as much like thou as ever it can grin.

FOOL (in a rage). It's not a bit like me: pray thee be off and spoon it.

BEELZEBUB. In comes old Beelzebub,
And on my back I carry a club,
And under my arm a white leather dripping pan.
My grey locks they hing so low.
I speak for myself, as far as I know.

FOOL. Wipe thy eyes old man, and thou wilt see clear.

BEELZEBUB. Methinks I will.

(Beelzebub is immediately cut down by St. George.)

FOOL. Five pounds for a doctor!

VOICE. Won't come under ten.

FOOL. Ten pounds for a doctor!

DOCTOR. Good evening, kind ladies and gentlemen. Here comes I the doctor.

FOOL. How came you to be a doctor?

DOCTOR (donning glassless spectacles). I have travelled for it.

Fool. Where have you travelled through?

Doctor. Through England, Ireland, France, and Spain,
Come back to old England a-doctoring again.

Fool. What can you cure?

Doctor. I can cure ipsy-pipsy, palsy, and the gout,
Where there is nineteen pains I can fetch one-and-twenty out.
And I have a drop of stuff in this bottle
That will physic rats, poison cats,
Or bring a dead man to life again.

Fool (pointing to prone Beelzebub). You seem a clever man—try your skill.

Doctor. Yes sir, so I will; I will feel on this man's pulse.

Fool. Is that where a man's pulse lies?

Doctor. Yes, it's the strongest part about a man. This foolish man has been trying a new experiment.

Fool. What's that, doctor?

Doctor. Why, he's been trying to cut his throat with a rolling pin. He is only in a trance. Strike up the little box and we will all have a dance.

A polka was played on the concertina, the gay Sergeant pairing with the lady, St. George with lame Jane, and the party rattled their heels on the kitchen floor until Mrs. Cowlamb began to feel exceedingly sensitive. The lady's veil was pushed up; and although the lady's face was screened by the tall soldier, it contrived to attract Iphis's eye at every

round. Iphis saw that it was Ephraim; he had ventured into the lion's den.

FOOL. What's all this dance jigging about?

SERGEANT. Sport, father.

FOOL. Sport? You sport till you kill yourself. My father and grandfather was a terrible jumper, and so am I.

SERGEANT. How came your grandfather to be such a terrible jumper?

FOOL. Why, he ran to the pond and pulled off his clothes, and said he would commit suicide.

SERGEANT. And then what did he do?

FOOL. He put on his clothes and came away again.

SERGEANT. How came your father to be such a terrible jumper?

FOOL. Why, he jumped so high he never came down again of seven years, and when he came down he had a wife and seven small children, of which I am the oldest and boldest and most terrible jumper.

SERGEANT. How came you to be such a terrible jumper?

FOOL. Why, I jumped and dropped against a pretty little milkmaid.

SERGEANT. Did you court her?

FOOL. Yes, I courted her for the milk she sold,
And she courted me for the lies I told.

All sing (while the Fool holds his box for contributions).

Good masters and good mistresses, as you sit round the fire,
Remember us poor plough-boys that plough through mud and mire.

The mire is so deep and the water is so clear,
And we thank you for a Christmas box and a drop of your best beer.

'It's taken a drop to colour that owd nose o' yours, Jacob,' said Cowlamb, as the Fool held the box before him.

LAME JANE. And a bit of your porkpie,
I'm as hungry as an old fool's dry.
FOOL. Thou ist always hungry.
LAME JANE. And thou ist always dry.

Cowlamb made a motion with his head, and on a side table appeared Christmas cheer and the beer longed for most. And while they were eating and drinking Cowlamb occupied himself in recognising each man under his disguise. Lame Jane he found to be a neer-do-weel Willowby labourer, fonder of the 'Brown Cow' than daily labour. But the lady persistently kept her veil over her eyes, or her face in shadow, and Cowlamb could not identify the individual. Refreshment over, to which due justice had been rendered, it was now for them to take their leave.

FOOL. I have just had a letter, my dear; can you read it?

LADY. The print is so small, you had better read it yourself.

FOOL. Dear Tom—dear Tom Bowling,
You had better leave off strolling,
Come home to your wife and family.
They are all sighing; they are all crying;—
So here goes—

(All sing, marching round).

Good masters and good mistresses, you see our fool has gone,
We will make it our business to follow him along.
We thank you for civility, and what you've given us here,
And we wish you a merry Christmas, and a happy New Year.

At this last march round, Cowlamb pulled the fair unknown round; the expression of good-fellowship in his face changed instantly to one of rage, for in the lady of the 'plough-jags' he recognised the blacksmith's apprentice, and Iphis sitting there must have known it all along. For anything he knew something might have passed between them.

What messages could not a lover flash with his eyes!

CHAPTER 28.

A STATUTE HIRING.

It is April, the hedges emerald hued, the blackthorn white over, the oak in leaf early 't'year,' and the yew budding fairly. What greens! Nothing is sombre, the clambering ivy rivals the birch in delicacy of colour, hiding its winter leaf in young and tender shoots. Apple blossom is luxuriant. We catch glimpses of early flowering spring plants. The glad earth, refreshed with copious dews and Sol's bright beams, puts forth once more her surcease of colour, her prodigality of vegetation, her promise of abundance.

Servant men are looking forward. Shortly comes the day when blithely plough-lads say one to another, 'Last yok'.' Then a week's

liberty, dear faces to see again, the lass to meet their eyes rested on last year with some greater degree of kindness. Perhaps until death parts Darby will take Joan this May; and although but a confined labourer on a lonely farm, he will pass his evenings henceforth by his own ingle. He will exchange a rough yet plenteous table maybe for one more meagre; as time creeps on a brood of lusty, thick-limbed children will besiege it with appetites. Days grow harder, but he will never bewail his fate, happy in that which he possesses, happy in the possession of that which many a rich man craves for. Honest son of the soil, thy face is full of good and constant humour, thy heart warm and hands willing, faithful servant often to indifferent master, not envious but generous, obedient son, true husband and faithful father, thou art worthier of reverence than the Crœsus to whom sycophants bow, though the advantages of wealth are not to be disparaged, but the arrogance and pride of purse which it too often en-

genders. Brave old labourer, too often ending thy days on the highway on poorest pittance, tottering but steadfast, bravely accepting life, warm thought thy solace in that descendants to the third generation follow in thy wake, 'out at sarvice.' Dost thou not recall May-days, 'stattuses' long past?—then, the flaxen down was on thy lip, freckles powdering thy nose. In thy sleeved waistcoat of peony hue or long blue blouse with countless buttons thou felt thyself equal to any. Does it rain May week, thou commiserates holidays so unfortunate. ''Tis bad for the poor lads and lasses.'

Iphis was pale yet. She sat in the kitchen at Willowby. How could she help her thoughts travelling back? This day was the day of sale at Snailhorn. Farmer Cowlamb had departed thither. His only remaining son would be there. Mrs. Cowlamb, quite at a loss, regarded her daughter with some mental bewilderment. She did not know how to talk to Iphis, so continued

silent. She had to content herself with flickering looks at her child, constrained to regard her as a human being difficult to comprehend or cast in with. Mrs. Cowlamb had ventured upon a commonplace remark, and Iphis had peevishly retorted in quick, resentful voice—

'There—mother—don't.'

Mrs. Cowlamb was too well understood by her daughter. The expression of resigned sadness, as the recurrence of a terrible season naturally affected the family, was scarcely genuine. We are expected to be hypocrites at times, have doleful faces when our hearts are far from being sad. Mrs. Cowlamb might not be glad to think that her husband's favourite though debauched son had gone the way of all flesh prematurely, but she had never had any real affection for him. It was doubtful if she possessed affection as a virtue. It seemed strange to her that Iphis should fret for Sam; but then, whatever Sam's faults were, how he had been chivalrous to Iphis!

He had almost stood at Iphis's back to defy her father.

The farm was to be given up. There would have been no difficulty retaining it, but Cowlamb's other son did not want it, and Cowlamb himself was growing more and more weary. The memories were too bitter for him to return there, much as he loved lonely Snailhorn.

What a dreary winter it had been for Iphis! The doctor's fear of brain fever was not ill-founded; Iphis lay between life and death for some time at Snailhorn. She was some weeks before she could be removed to Willowby. Home—it was a prison-house. She felt herself a wreck; for a time she thought that she should never be strong again. She resigned herself to death. Indeed her flesh had gone, her cheeks were hollow, her eyes deep-sunken, her lips colourless, she had lost the bright, rosy tint in her cheeks. From the healthy country lass she seemed to have merged into the sad, careworn woman.

But with such a physique as hers, even a fever's ravages were not likely to have lasting effect. As Farmer Cowlamb said, more to encourage her, she at last began 'to pick up her crumbs.' The invigorating air of spring, beautiful spring, went far to restore her.

But the house was wearisome to her, her mother's voice more subdued than ever, her father reticent, although wistfully desirous to see her recovering quickly, yet showing only too clearly how his heart was stricken, and his cheerfulness clouded with the recollection of the ending of the life of his favourite and once most promising son.

Sam's affairs had not soothed the farmer The alien wife came in for the greater part of Sam's money. Sam had never revoked a will made greatly in her favour, made at a time when Sam was in hopes that she would return to him. Sam had resented her point blank refusal, and had determined to alter his disposition of his money, but he had put off and

put off until it was too late. What annoyed Farmer Cowlamb more, whispers were afloat of Mrs. Sam entertaining the idea of marriage again. It was a triumphant case with her of despoiling the Egyptians.

To Iphis, 'being a lady,' as her mother termed it—namely, doing nothing and sitting with her hands across—was simply unbearable. She chafed and fretted at not being allowed to do this or that for fear of taking cold. She had been out a little to chapel, where every one's eyes were upon her. She could feel the argus-eyed congregation all over her, in her back even. An odd time or so she had walked through the village and passed the blacksmith's shop. The knotted glass in the windows glowed with a red light. She could discern a figure at the bellows, his body inclining with rhythmical precision; then some movement was made with the fire, but she was quickly past—only, looking round, Iphis saw Ephraim Sparrow, a glowing shoe on the punch, a horse's hind leg in his lap. There

was smoke, a smell of burning, the horse somewhat restless, then the shoe was withdrawn. Iphis was still observing the process—she had witnessed it before any number of times—when Ephraim looked up and after her. She was sure that he had recognised her.

She was thinking of this now.

Moreover, she was wondering if her father would call upon old Mr. Long. Before Sam's death she had almost persuaded herself that she must submit, accept her fate, marry the old reprobate. Her dream having faded away out of her mind she had been strangely irresolute. Then after, that strange freak of Ephraim's getting into the house in such a disguise. That showed that Ephraim was still true. Her father had discoverd him at the last moment. She had expected some severe animadversions on such a scapegrace, but the farmer had discreetly held his tongue. Ephraim had never spoken to her, but she felt that she could reckon upon his devotion.

'Where's the gell going?' asked Iphis

at last, for Damaris, the maid-servant, came down the back stairs in all her holiday bravery, her face shining with soap and red with exultation and excitement.

'The stattus.'

'The stattus?' repeated Iphis. 'I had forgotten.' She felt herself almost out of the world in her forgetfulnes of seasons and festivals. 'The stattus; I think I shall go, mother.'

'Thou?' remonstrated her mother; 'thou'rt not fit. The sun's gleamy, but it's not a real fine day. I don't think your father would be in for it, Iphis, if he was at home.'

'Maybe not,' said Iphis, calmly, 'but I'm sick o' being penned up in the house.'

Mrs. Cowlamb looked on helplessly, dejectedly. She wished her husband was at home; there was no telling how he would take it. She herself could see no harm in Iphis going to the statute. She had liked going herself when she was Iphis's age. But her husband was circumventing fate to the

best of his ability. She knew that. Towse would leave them in a week or two. Ephraim Sparrow would be 'lowse' shortly. Some understanding existed between Cowlamb and the blacksmith. Ephraim would have to travel from the village. The Towses would not harbour him for any length of time. When thrown on their own resources they would have too many mouths to think of entertaining guests, much less a fellow with a trade at his finger ends. Farmer Cowlamb's policy, then, was to keep Iphis in retirement until this lad got well away. Make her believe that she was too delicate to leave the house yet awhile. 'Paumper' her, as the farmer expressed it, into making her believe herself weaker and more delicate than she really was, and the farmer had nearly succeeded.

But what is a statute hiring in these degenerate days? It is but a skeleton of its former self. The peripatetic shows and shooting galleries still come. There are the stalls where the small fry shoot at a yard's

range at a split ring ; they have the delight of seeing Jack emerge out of his box, and their modicum of 'rock,' a sticky and far from appetising conglomeration. The galleries, with their long tubes and excited bell, are for children of larger growth. The old tumbling show puts in its appearance still, though much bedrabbled and timeworn ; but it has now to compete with the velocipedes and steam roundabouts—what an innovation! At night that rapidly-revolving circle makes one dizzy, the glare of light on so much colour makes one's eyes smart, the whistle startles one, and the returns make one calculate how long the proprietor will carry it on. He must soon gain a competence. Time was when urchins pushed while more fortunate ones rode, enduring the long whip, redoubling their exertions in the delusive hope of a free circuit. And the swing-boats then, they did swing—not revolve as now on an axis with frightful precision.

It is the younger servants who keep the

institution alive. The tradition remains with them. Old people come to see their children released for the day, or to look after their boys and girls. Fights are infrequent. There is tremendous competition; the noise is so great, talking is difficult. But all the catch-pennies are dismal. Ask a showman—in mournful accents he will tell you that trade is dull, that times are not what they were, the sword swallower will bear him out, his own clown, his neighbour who farms the fat lady and the dwarf. The old peep-show owner rails at the stereoscopic slides. He perseveres, disgusted nevertheless at failing appreciation; cannot you recall him at his best, standing outside his show, the strings of his baize curtains in his fingers:—

'The fall of Nineveh. You have here a correct representation of the burning city. The king after his decisive overthrow returns to his capital, and, heaping his treasures on a pile, resolves to throw himself into the flames. On the right you see the king and

his concubines surrounded by his bodyguard. In the centre you will perceive the queen surrounded by her maids of honour. To the left the soldiers carrying away the precious stones, the gold and silver, and the valuables of the king——'

Who remembers not the nasal tone? Who was not awed and impressed with the old fellow's erudite gravity?

The lads and lasses stand about with true bucolic features. What a wonderfully taking expression they have, the wish to be amused! It is half the battle getting people in that humour. The showmen see it and bawl with might and main. The faces relax, but the gaper's eyes are roving. Who has come to 'stattus t' year?' A face that seems familiar confronts another.

'Hallo, Bill! how art ee?'

The Bill addressed stares stonily into the eyes of his accoster and speaks not for some moments, but continues staring, the other enduring the ordeal bravely.

'Be dal'd if I knaw thee,' comes at last.

'Ya don't,' drawled as slowly.

'Be—dal'd—if—I—do!'

'Doan't ya remember a chap as lev wi' owd Cowlamb?'

'Why, thou beant Jack?'

'Bud I be.'

'Gom, if ya hadn't ha' told me I shouldn't ha' know'd thee agean. Where has ta been sin' last May?'

'Grassby. But I hadn't goin' another year.'

'I stop agean. Hes ta seen owt o' Sally? She lev wi' thou and me, if t' remembers.'

'I seed her about an hour agone. She's grown a fine strappin' wench. Bud she's got a chap.'

'I niver set eyes on her sin' we all left. What art ee goin' to hev?'

'Art ee goin' to stan' treat? Well, I can drink a pint o' ale——'

'Ony time. Heigh, Sukey! thou seen

owt o' Sally ; here's Jack Slowfeed, he lev wi' her.'

And Jack and Tom adjourn to the 'Greyhound,' there to cement friendship with deep draughts out of pewter,—but it is ale brewed for the occasion.

With long confinement indoors Iphis felt tender ; the air was chill, for a breeze from the north-east was blowing. But for all that it seemed to brace her and do her good. She was well wrapped—goloshes on her feet. She fancied that the people in traps stared at her. Many of us have the inordinate vanity of fancying we are noticeable. But now Iphis fancied that they looked at her commiseratingly, and she resented nothing so much as condolence or pity. Some farming lads passed her almost at a run ; some she could tell had walked some distance by the different coloured mud upon their boots. Not one with a peony waistcoat—most of them wearing cloth clothes, and carrying a sensible

overcoat. The few who wore fustian jackets sported a velvet collar.

She almost expected to see Ephraim in one of these groups. She wondered if his curmudgeon of a master would grant him a day's liberty. Still, she asserted to herself convincingly, she was not going to the statute to see Ephraim. But what was she going for? She found some difficulty in the self-imposed question, but it was to see the racket and commotion—people enjoying or making great efforts to enjoy themselves. She could hear already the thud of the drum and the blare of indifferent music. At the town-end groups of farming lads and older men stood. The edge of their mad haste to reach the town somewhat dulled with second thought. Near to them was an old thatched public-house, quaint and inviting.

Iphis could not help quickening her steps after the first glimpse of crowd and canvas and yellow waggons. Her eyes brightened at the stir and colour and scent; any one could

smell Grantham gingerbread. What a dense crowd—what a Babel of sound! Waxworks in a habitation ablaze with colour and gold; a huge Leviathan emitting tunes not the most melodious, but sufficiently powerful to drown the efforts of all rivals. To the music of this monster a little sylph was dancing as if she enjoyed it. She had fair hair and a sweet, pretty face; her motions were graceful, and the little creature smiled.

'Dear, dear, pratty creatur', I could kiss them pink legs——. An' she 's frillin' to her drawers.'

Iphis looked towards the speaker. It was Mrs. Towse, and Mrs. Towse recognised her.

'If it isn't Iphis, poor thing. You're getting on then. My word, it has taken the flesh off ye. I should ha' been to ask after you, but I dursn't come, an' that's the truth. My man said—— eh, Joel!' shrieked Mrs. Towse, 'come you here, you'll be run ower. Law, bless me, one wants to be made o' money.

The baens wants to go in all the shows, little or big. I been telling Rachel the waxworks is all like dead folks, it's a dele prettier outside. I remember going to waxworks, an' they'd got helters on their necks and such white faces, just as they was took. My man's got off, I hope he wean't git fresh, the policemen are so particular now-a-days.'

'You've locked up the house, then, Mrs. Towse, and all of you come to the stattus?'

'Heigh,' cackled Mrs. Towse, her shrill laughter echoing far and near—everybody was sensitive to mirth—'my man an' me thowt we'd bring the baens. Now, where's that Joel? He's gen me the slip.' And Mrs. Towse darted into the crowd.

Iphis was disappointed. She wished to learn if Ephraim Sparrow was in the town. She did not like asking the direct question. She felt sure that Mrs. Towse in her garrulousness would supply the information.

Iphis pressed through the crowd, giving

the whirling roundabouts a wide berth ; they made her dizzy. She would, perhaps, meet with Mrs. Towse again. She caught a glimpse of Joel, playing a sort of thread-the-needle, the anxious mother futilely endeavouring to catch him. A great attraction to Joel were the spangled ladies, who had peculiar jumps before passing under the curtain. The proprietor was now vaunting the unrivalled performances of the young lady on the tight and slack rope ; of the pony, richly caparisoned and tightly reined to girth, who on the stage gave proofs of his remarkable versatility and intelligence ; of the dog, who might have been made out of a flock mattress, and whose dumbness was a constant source of irritation to him. Then the showman ceased speaking, and two lads went through a series of tumbles, one of them afterwards hurrying to the gong, the other to cornet and drum, while Mr. Merryman straightened his face, and stepping down the inclined plane, pointed with his whip to the painted canvas, and with

his hand to his mouth shouted at the top of his voice—

'A—o—o—o! walk up! walk up, ladies and gentlemen, the performance is now about to begin. The young lady is on the tight rope (at this moment the curtains divide and a glimpse is caught of her). We shall not wait a moment. Hi! Hi! Hi! come and see the Brothers Lizardo, the champion contortionists, tumblers, boneless prodigies—of the world—in their matchless performance, as given before the Queen and Royal Family at Windsor Castle by special command. Admission, two—pence; children, half price.'

Mr. Merryman strikes the canvas smartly with his whip. The brothers vanish into the interior, and Mr. Merryman backs from the gangway, retiring to the gong, and the inclined plane is covered with lads and lasses, old 'chaps' and their wives with shame-faced grins on their weather-beaten faces. Had the earth opened Iphis could not have regarded the spectacle with more amazement and

deeper irritation, for there was Ephraim Sparrow dressed in the suit of good clothes he had earned in his stolen time, leading up their own servant girl. And Damaris strutted proudly, her rosy face aglow. Ephraim, too, for anything Iphis could tell, was quite content with Damaris. They were evidently on the best of terms with each other. Iphis recollected the morning, how, when Damaris came down the stairs showing her substantial white-stockinged ankles, her ripe, rosy, healthy face to follow after, her movements alert and bouncing, she had felt a pulsation of envy course through her veins. When she herself had been full of health, rosy, and plump, she had undervalued it all. It seemed to her that Ephraim was influenced easily to any one if they had red cheeks and plump shoulders. Well, but what did it matter to her; she was to marry Mr. Long? She had half persuaded herself once—that terrible time! It had almost slipped out of her head again. Mr. Long and Mr. Gerli-

more. Between them to choose. Poor old Parson; she was to go to him if she was rendered desperate. She would have Mr. Long now. Nothing would induce her ever again to speak to Ephraim Sparrow. She would have none of Damaris's leavings. A sly, deep thing! Iphis's breast was stirred with thoughts of revenge. There were many ways of making Damaris suffer. Only Damaris would be at liberty in a fortnight, and a fortnight's martyrdom of fault-finding and hole-picking is over incredibly quick. And Iphis thought that Damaris, scenting freedom, would accept any spitefulness with brave stolidity; she would eat and sleep just the same, and on the last day snap her fingers at them all. Poor wights submit to hardships without complaint. Indeed it is a question if they always do see a hard life as such. Bred without comfort or much care, any consideration is the least thing they expect. So they sit down to miseries without murmurs. But, oh! the kind word, and the

golden maxim, if the word is regarded lightly and the practice unconsidered, how are we certain that each shall not bear in good time golden fruit?

She meant to go, but she was so full of bitterness that she forgot herself. She stood with her eyes fixed on the glowing canvases of the tumbling show. She could hear the laughter and din inside, the Pandean pipes and drum, the short barks of the trained dog, the clapping of hands. She knew as well as could be what was going on inside. She had seen it over and over again—heard the jokes, from the clown and his chalk to the pony pointing out the proprietor as the greatest rascal. How she would have writhed had she known that the sagacious pony stopped at Ephraim and Damaris as the two who would next 'shake hands in wedlock bands'!

The large drum inside was beaten, the curtains separated, and Iphis recovered herself. It was not worth her while staying;

she would go home. She gathered up her skirts, turned on her heel, and pressed through the crowd.

In her mind, the one little bit of romance in her life was over.

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